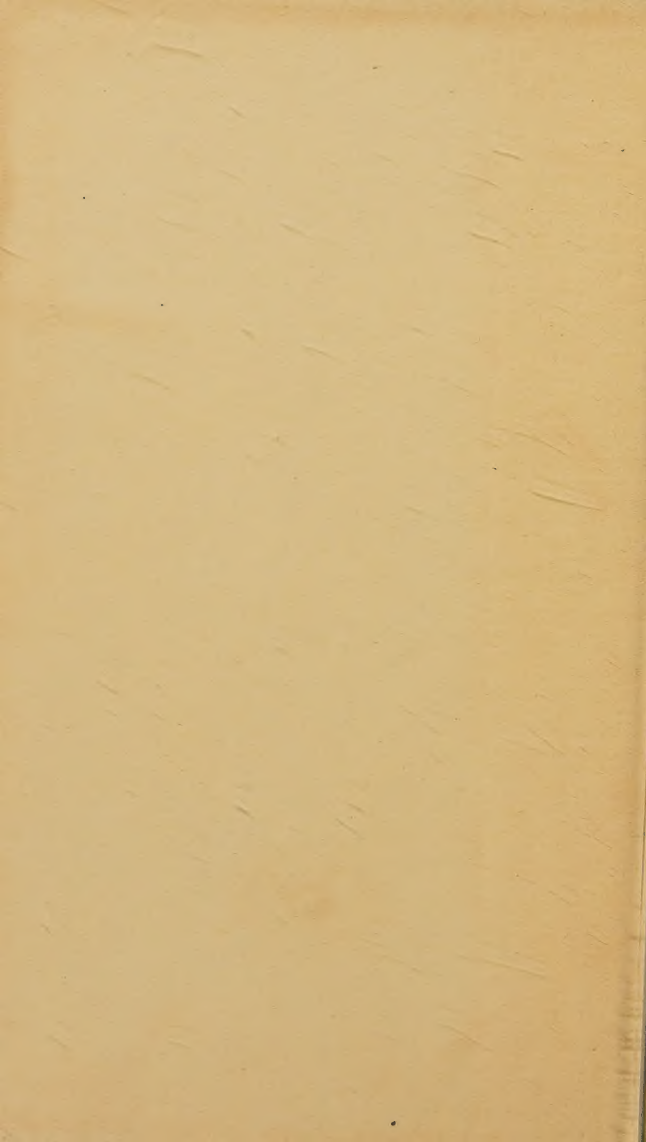




MEDITATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS
ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Nullus Obstat.

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MEDITATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN

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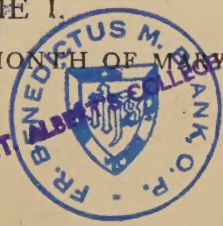
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Professor of Theology

Translated by
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PRIVY CHAMBERLAIN TO H.H. PIUS X

VOLUME I.

FEASTS OF MARY, MONTH OF MARY

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WE willingly grant our approbation to the "Meditations on the Blessed Virgin, for the Use of the Clergy and the Faithful," by the Rev. Father Vermeersch, S.J. The clergy and the laity alike will find herein, in devotional form, a solid treatise of Mariology, to sustain their piety and their confidence in the Mother of God. Priests will have at their disposal a rich mine of materials for sermons on the glories of Mary, by which they may instil into the minds of Christians that real devotion, which is at once so salutary and so necessary, towards the Blessed Virgin.

✠ G. J., BISHOP OF BRUGES.

BRUGES,

Holy Thursday, 1905.

3659

I, JOSEPH DE VOS, Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Belgium, by the authority committed to me by the Very Reverend Father Louis Martin, General of the said Society, hereby grant permission for the printing of the work of the Rev. A. Vermeersch, S.J., entitled "Meditations on the Blessed Virgin."

Given under my hand and seal,

J. DE VOS, S.J.

LOUVAIN,

April 10, 1905.

PREFACE

THIS book, a humble offering to Mary in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the dogma of her Immaculate Conception, is divided into three principal parts.

The first part contains meditations for the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, with a short introduction on the origin and meaning of each feast.

The second part, intended for use during the month of May, might be called *Mary in the Gospels*, for in it we contemplate the Mother of God and of men in all the incidents of her life recorded in the New Testament.

The fundamental idea of the third part is suggested by the Predestination of the august Mother of God, and her place in the admirable plan of Divine Providence. In this part we see Mary chosen, and conducted by the radiant path of graces and virtues to the highest pinnacle of created glory; we endeavour to illustrate more fully her graces and virtues in accordance with the laws of Catholic ascetical theology.

The first part, then, will familiarize us with the

feasts of Mary, the second with her life on earth, the third with the teaching of the Church concerning her dignity.

The habit of preparing ourselves for the principal feasts has rendered it desirable to add two novenas of meditations—one is a preparation for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception; the other, to be used at any time, but especially suitable for the Assumption, treats of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and the best means of acquiring it.

Many movable feasts fall in the month of May, according to the variations of the Ecclesiastical Calendar; and the faithful, who make the month of May a season for special fervour in devotion, will find at the end of the book meditations for a fortnight at Pentecost and for the Feasts of the Patronage of St. Joseph, the Holy Trinity, and the Blessed Sacrament.

In honouring the Immaculate Conception, we must not forget the young Belgian Saint who was celebrated for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. At the close of the second volume are given five meditations, corresponding to the devotion of the five Sundays of St. John Berchmans.

In the development of the subjects of meditation, we have treated both of doctrine and of the pious

practices suggested by it, so that the reader may be led to a fuller understanding of the truths of Faith, and to a life more generously inspired by the principles of Christ. Mary is the Mother of Christians, and their model also.

The matter of each meditation will probably be found sufficient for several exercises. After having once exhausted the list of subjects proposed, the reader may return and commence anew at the second or third point.

The first Index gives not only the place, but the theme of the different meditations, and at the end of the book is an alphabetical table of the principal matters contained in it.

The author offers his book to preachers and to the faithful generally. To both classes of readers he has endeavoured to present exact conclusions supported by solid reasoning, never relying on mere legends or false interpretations of Holy Scripture.

This modest work does not pretend to any great importance, but in proportion as by the grace of God it helps its readers to a better knowledge of the Blessed Virgin and a more enlightened piety, it will serve to strengthen their faith also. Our Faith, which is so fiercely attacked in these days, has need of a double defence, which shall, first,

show the solidity of its foundations, and, secondly (a more important consideration for Catholics), in making it better known, shall cause it to be more fervently loved and more exactly practised.

Finally, we would impress upon our readers the importance of mental prayer. The time of meditation, instead of being passed in vague and ineffectual musing, should be the most precious hour for the formation of Christian character—the hour of growth in moral worth, the hour of practical enlightenment and generous resolutions, the hour when a Christian humbles himself before God in order to rise superior to the world.

May the Immaculate Virgin deign to bless the work we offer her with full confidence in her merciful goodness !

THE METHOD OF MEDITATION

MEDITATION is that form of mental prayer in which we apply the three powers of the soul to some truth or mystery, from which the soul may learn to reform itself and be transformed into God. It requires—

1. A definite, practical end, ardently wished for, and energetically sought for. The intensity of our desire stimulates our ardour in the pursuit of it.

2. A subject well chosen, divided under different heads, sufficiently prepared to be easily grasped by our intelligence.

3. Calm, serious concentration of our whole attention on the subject. And for this purpose—

(a) We must first devote some moments to recollection, in which we place ourselves in the presence of God, and humble ourselves at His feet, while we raise our eyes to His throne of glory in Heaven.

(b) We must fix our attention on the visible side of the subject, or on some scene likely to bring it to our minds, or to arouse the sentiment desired.

(c) We must employ our intelligence to scrutinize the subject, so as to draw out comparisons and analogies, not as a mere speculative exercise, but to enable us the better to understand the subject, so that our will may be touched and our energy directed to improvement.

(d) Our will must be ready to seize the practical conclusions that we draw with affection and a firm purpose of amendment.

4. Frequent appeal to God for help. All this work, directed to a supernatural end, is done with a full consciousness of our own weakness. Our very efforts are a prayer, asking God to come to our aid.

5. Complete abandonment to God. Without troubling ourselves about our own plans, let us fix our thoughts on the truths illuminated by His grace, cherish the sentiments which He puts into our hearts, walk in the way which He marks out for us, and gratefully accept His invitations.

The meditation is preceded by an *Introduction*. The soul approaches God with reverence, confesses its unworthiness, expresses its confidence in God, and makes an offering of itself to Him. After this we bring the subject before our minds by the aid of our memory and imagination, and add a

prayer suitable to the subject of the meditation. These are the preludes.

Our mental prayer is continued according to the points marked out, passing from the first to the second and third, as each is exhausted.

Then follows a final prayer, which we call the *Colloquy*, in which we lay bare our souls before God, and tell Him of all our desires and necessities, and all our love ; and we conclude with a short vocal prayer—*Our Father* or *Hail Mary*, or such other as the meditation suggests to our mind.

INDEX OF MEDITATIONS

FIRST PART

MEDITATIONS FOR THE FEASTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

	PAGE
PRELIMINARY REMARKS - - - - -	I
THE COMMEMORATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN ON	
JANUARY I - - - - -	3
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	3
MEDITATION : MARY'S PART IN THE MYSTERY OF OUR	
ADOPTION - - - - -	5
ESPOUSALS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND ST.	
JOSEPH (JANUARY 23) - - - - -	10
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	10
MEDITATION : THE UNION OF MARY AND JOSEPH	11
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY (THIRD SUNDAY AFTER	
EPIPHANY) - - - - -	17
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	17
MEDITATION : THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY AND THE	
FAMILY WITHOUT GOD - - - - -	18
THE PURIFICATION (FEBRUARY 2) - - - - -	24
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	24
CONTEMPLATION OF THE MYSTERY AND ITS	
ATTENDANT CIRCUMSTANCES - - - - -	25

	PAGE
THE APPARITION OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES (FEBRUARY 11) - - - - -	33
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	33
MEDITATION : THE GRACES BESTOWED BY THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	33
THE ANNUNCIATION (MARCH 25) - - - - -	39
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	39
MEDITATION : THE VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	40
THE SEVEN DOLOURS (FIRST FEAST : FRIDAY AFTER PASSION SUNDAY) - - - - -	43
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	43
MEDITATION : THE SORROWS OF MARY DURING THE PASSION OF JESUS - - - - -	45
OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL (APRIL 26) - - - - -	50
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	50
MEDITATION : GOOD COUNSEL - - - - -	51
THE MOTHER OF THE DIVINE SHEPHERD (FIRST SUNDAY IN MAY) - - - - -	56
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	56
MEDITATION : MARY LEADING US TO JESUS - - - - -	57
OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS (MAY 24) - - - - -	61
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	61
MEDITATION : THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD AND THE HELP OF MARY - - - - -	62
OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART (MAY 31) - - - - -	67
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	67
MEDITATION : THE UNION OF MARY IMMACULATE AND THE SACRED HEART - - - - -	70
MARY, MOTHER OF DIVINE GRACE (JUNE 9) - - - - -	74
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	74
MEDITATION : THE MANY GRACES THAT COME TO US THROUGH MARY - - - - -	75

INDEX OF MEDITATIONS

xix

	PAGE
OUR LADY OF THE STREET (SECOND SUNDAY IN JUNE) - - - - -	79
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	79
MEDITATION : THE TEACHING OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN TO THE PASSING CROWD - - -	81
OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR (SUNDAY BEFORE THE FEAST OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST, JUNE 24)	85
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	85
MEDITATION : PERPETUAL NEED AND PERPETUAL SUCCOUR - - - - -	86
THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN (JULY 2) -	91
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	91
MEDITATION : MARY THE CONSOLER - - -	92
OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL (JULY 16) - -	97
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	97
MEDITATION : THE MEANING OF THE SCAPULAR -	98
OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS (AUGUST 2) - - -	104
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	104
MEDITATION : MARY AND THE ANGELS - -	105
OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS (AUGUST 5) - - -	109
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	109
MEDITATION : THE CHURCHES OF MARY - -	111
THE ASSUMPTION (AUGUST 15) - - - -	115
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	115
FIRST MEDITATION : MARY IN GLORY - -	117
SECOND MEDITATION : THE PRESENT AND FUTURE LIFE - - - - -	123
THE MOST PURE HEART OF MARY (SUNDAY AFTER THE OCTAVE OF THE ASSUMPTION) - -	129
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	129
MEDITATION : PURITY OF HEART - - -	130

	PAGE
THE NATIVITY OF OUR LADY (SEPTEMBER 8) - -	135
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	135
MEDITATION : THE JOY CAUSED BY THE BIRTH OF MARY - - - - -	136
THE HOLY NAME OF MARY (SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY) - - - -	141
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	141
MEDITATION : THE HOLINESS AND VIRTUE OF THE NAME OF MARY - - - - -	142
OUR LADY OF MERCY (SEPTEMBER 24) - -	147
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	147
MEDITATION : THE PROTECTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	148
THE SEVEN DOLOURS (SECOND FEAST, THIRD SUN- DAY IN SEPTEMBER) - - - - -	153
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	153
MEDITATION : DEVOTION TO THE SORROWS OF MARY - - - - -	154
OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY (FIRST SUNDAY IN OCTOBER) - - - - -	158
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	158
MEDITATION : THE HOLY ROSARY - - -	159
THE DIVINE MATERNITY OF MARY (SECOND SUNDAY IN OCTOBER) - - - - -	163
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	163
MEDITATION : THE ANTIPHONS OF LAUDS - -	164
THE PURITY OF MARY (THIRD SUNDAY IN OCTOBER)	170
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	170
MEDITATION : THE VIRGINITY OF MARY - -	170
THE PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN (NOVEMBER 21) - - - - -	176
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	176
MEDITATION : MARY'S OFFERING OF HERSELF TO GOD - - - - -	177

INDEX OF MEDITATIONS

xxi

	PAGE
THE PATRONAGE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN (ONE SUNDAY IN NOVEMBER) - - - -	182
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	182
MEDITATION : THE MEANING OF THE FEAST -	183
THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (DECEMBER 8) -	188
PRELIMINARY REMARKS - - - - -	188
DOGMATIC EVOLUTION AND PAPAL INFALLIBILITY	188
ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST - - -	195
NOVENA IN HONOUR OF THE IMMACULATE CON- CEPTION - - - - -	200
FIRST DAY : THE MOTIVES FOR HONOURING MARY IMMACULATE - - - - -	200
SECOND DAY : THE PROTO-EVANGEL - - -	206
THIRD DAY : THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IM- MACULATE CONCEPTION - - - - -	213
FOURTH DAY : THE DIGNITY OF THE PREROGATIVE	218
FIFTH DAY : THE AVE MARIA OF THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN - - - - -	224
SIXTH DAY : MARY IMMACULATE AND THE ANGELS	229
SEVENTH DAY : MARY IMMACULATE AND THE HUMAN RACE - - - - -	233
EIGHTH DAY : MARY IMMACULATE AND THE HUMAN RACE (<i>continued</i>) - - - - -	238
NINTH DAY : MARY IMMACULATE AND THE HUMAN RACE (<i>concluded</i>) - - - - -	242
MEDITATIONS FOR THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION - - - - -	248
FIRST EXERCISE : THE FEAST OF HEAVEN AND THE CHURCH MILITANT, AND THE CONFUSION OF HELL	248
SECOND EXERCISE : WHAT THE DAY SHOULD BE FOR US - - - - -	252
THE TRANSLATION OF THE HOUSE OF LORETO (DECEMBER 10) - - - - -	256
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	256
MEDITATION : ON PILGRIMAGES - - -	257

	PAGE
THE EXPECTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN (DECEMBER 18) - - - - -	261
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	261
MEDITATION : THE EXPECTATION OF THE COMING OF JESUS - - - - -	262

APPENDIX

NOVENA TO OBTAIN DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	266
FIRST DAY : THE END AND THE MEANS - -	266
SECOND DAY : DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND SALVATION - - - - -	269
THIRD DAY : DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND PERFECTION - - - - -	274
FOURTH DAY : DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN FEELINGS - - - - -	278
FIFTH DAY : DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND LANGUAGE - - - - -	282
SIXTH DAY : PRACTICES OF PIETY IN DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	287
SEVENTH DAY : CAUSES OF FAILURE OR WEAKNESS IN DEVOTION - - - - -	291
EIGHTH DAY : FRUITS OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	296
NINTH DAY : A MODEL OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	299

SECOND PART

MEDITATIONS FOR THE MONTH OF MARY

PRELIMINARY REMARKS - - - - -	304
PREPARATORY EXERCISE : KEEPING THE MONTH OF MARY WELL - - - - -	305

FIRST SECTION

	PAGE
MARY AND THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL	309
FIRST DAY : THE ANGELIC SALUTATION - -	309
SECOND DAY : THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARY AND THE ARCHANGEL - - - - -	315
THIRD DAY : THE CONSENT OF MARY - -	319

SECOND SECTION

FROM THE VISITATION TO THE NATIVITY - -	322
FOURTH DAY : THE ENTHUSIASM OF MARY -	322
FIFTH DAY : THE CONGRATULATIONS OF ELIZABETH	327
SIXTH DAY : THE MAGNIFICAT (PART I.) - -	332
SEVENTH DAY : THE MAGNIFICAT (PART II.) -	336
EIGHTH DAY : THE TRIALS OF THE HOLY FAMILY	340

THIRD SECTION

THE NATIVITY - - - - -	346
NINTH DAY : MARY MOTHER OF A FIRST-BORN SON	346
TENTH DAY : THE JOYS OF THE MOTHER OF JESUS	349
ELEVENTH DAY : THE SWADDLING-CLOTHES OF JESUS - - - - -	352
TWELFTH DAY : THE CRIB OF JESUS - -	355
THIRTEENTH DAY : THE SELF-EFFACEMENT OF JESUS - - - - -	358
FOURTEENTH DAY : THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS - - - - -	361

FOURTH SECTION

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE AND THE HIDDEN LIFE OF OUR LORD - - - -	365
FIFTEENTH DAY : THE PRESENTATION OF THE INFANT JESUS - - - - -	365
SIXTEENTH DAY : THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN - - - - -	370

	PAGE
SEVENTEENTH DAY : THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON (PART I.) - - - - -	373
EIGHTEENTH DAY : THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON (PART II.) - - - - -	377
NINETEENTH DAY : ANNA THE PROPHETESS- -	381
TWENTIETH DAY : THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI	385
TWENTY-FIRST DAY : THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT -	389
TWENTY-SECOND DAY : THE SOJOURN IN EGYPT	392
TWENTY-THIRD DAY : THE RETURN FROM EGYPT	396
TWENTY-FOURTH DAY : THE HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS	399
TWENTY-FIFTH DAY : JESUS LOST AND FOUND -	404
TWENTY-SIXTH DAY : THE TEACHING OF JESUS	409

FIFTH SECTION

THE PUBLIC LIFE OF OUR LORD - - - -	413
TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY : THE MARRIAGE AT CANA -	413
TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY : MARY DURING THE PUBLIC LIFE OF JESUS - - - - -	417
INTRODUCTION : REMARKS ON CERTAIN SAYINGS OF OUR LORD - - - - -	417
MEDITATION : MARY AND THE TEACHING OF JESUS	420

SIXTH SECTION

THE SUFFERING LIFE OF OUR LORD - - -	424
TWENTY-NINTH DAY : MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS - - - - -	424
THIRTIETH DAY : MARY'S CONSENT TO THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS - - - - -	428

SEVENTH SECTION

AFTER THE ASCENSION - - - - -	433
THIRTY-FIRST DAY : MARY AND THE CHURCH OF THE CENACLE - - - - -	433

MEDITATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN

FIRST PART

MEDITATIONS FOR THE FEASTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

1. NOT a day passes but Mary receives from a part of the Christian world the homage due to the dignity of the Mother of God and the charity of the Mother of men. It is impossible, then, to write meditations for all the feasts of the Blessed Virgin ; those which are offered here seem sufficient to satisfy all the desires of piety.

This first part comprises meditations for all the feasts of the Universal Calendar of the Latin Church, and all those which are so generally kept that their Mass and Office are included in the Appendix *pro aliquibus locis* of the Missal and Breviary, and also for a small number of other feasts observed in various places. Moreover, in the Index of Subjects of the different meditations, it will not be difficult to find subjects suitable to

the devotion of particular countries or religious societies.

2. We have constantly kept two ends in view in putting forward the points for meditation: to bring into prominence some characteristic of the solemnity, and to support our reflections by well-ascertained data; and thus to satisfy the needs of solid and intelligent piety.

We have considered it both interesting and instructive to recall the origins of the different feasts, so far as they are known.

3. For the purpose of this historic part of the Introductions, the following works have been consulted:

BENEDICT XIV. *De festis D.N. Jesu Christi et B.M. Virginis libri duo.* Bassano, 1797.

BINTERIM. *Die vorzüglichsten Denkwürdigkeiten der Christ-Katholischen Kirche.* Mayence, 1831.

NILLES, S. J. *Kalendarium manuale utriusque Ecclesiæ.* Innsbruck, 1896.

F. G. HOLWECK. *Fasti Mariani, sive Calendarium Festorum S. Mariæ Virginis Deiparæ, memoriis historicis illustratum.* Freiburg im Breisgau, 1892.

MARTENE, O.S.B. *De antiquis Ecclesiæ Ritibus.* Antverpiæ, 1764.

DR. KELLNER. *Heortologie, oder das Kirchenjahr und die Heiligenfeste in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung.* Freiburg im Breisgau, 1901.

L. DUCHESNE. *Les Origines du Culte Chrétien.* Paris, 1898.

ANALECTA BOLLANDIANA. Brussels, 1882, etc.

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HERGENROTHER and KAULEN. *Kirchenlexicon*, 2nd edition. Freiburg im Breisgau, 1882-1903.

THE COMMEMORATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

JANUARY I

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—Let us not be misled by the name actually given to the feast of the first of January. Catholic piety may enjoy the consolation of knowing that the first-fruits of the year are placed by the Church itself under the protection of Jesus and Mary. The old Roman Calendar mentioned on this day, together with the Octave of the Nativity, a feast of Our Lady, and until the thirteenth century the ancient practice was observed of celebrating at the beginning of the year two Masses, the one of the Circumcision, and the other of the Blessed Virgin. In the Antiphonary of St. Gregory the Great, we find on the first of January an office of Our Lady, and the collect prescribed in his Sacramentary prays God that we may feel the benefits of the intercession of Mary. This collect is preserved in the present liturgy; for, while the Roman Martyrology proclaims to-day the *Circumcision of Our Lord and the Octave of the Nativity*, the Divine Office is a combination of two ancient offices, the one of Our Lord, and the other of His Mother: it addresses congratulations to Mary in the midst of the thanks-

givings which it offers to God for the birth of the Redeemer.

Apparently this commemoration of Mary is connected with the custom still observed in the Greek Church of honouring, shortly after the celebration of the different mysteries, the memory of the holy persons who have had any part in them. Thus, on December 26, the Greek Church holds a *synaxis* (or religious assembly) in honour of the holy Mother of God, which we find in the calendars of the Greeks, Slavs, Roumanians, Arabs, and Syrians.

The Feast of the Circumcision itself, mentioned at the Council of Tours held in 567, does not go back earlier than the latter part of the sixth century, and there is nothing to show that it was kept at Rome before the ninth. Certain indecent merry-makings, relics of pagan customs, disgraced the first days of the year and necessitated expiatory ceremonies, which hindered the institution of a festival; and this was probably the cause of a third Mass which was formerly celebrated on that day, *Ad prohibendum ab idolis* (against idolatry). The first of January was also considered as the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus until the institution of a separate festival; for which reason the Society of Jesus still keeps its titular feast on that day.

Let us then remember, following the authors who have written on this subject, that the first of January is sanctified by a feast in which Mary is associated with Jesus.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In the plan of the meditation we shall endeavour to dwell upon (1) *the*

mystery of the day, the Circumcision and the Octave of the Nativity ; (2) *the character of the liturgy* which associates Jesus and Mary ; and (3) *the beginning of the new year*. Each of these objects suggests reflections from which we shall endeavour to derive profit to our souls.

MEDITATION.

“ Misit Deus Filium suum factum ex muliere . . . ut adoptionem filiorum reciperemus ”—God sent His Son, made of a woman, . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. iv. 4, 5).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the humble house of Bethlehem. There, before the eyes of Mary, the circumcision took place ; there that Mother saw the shedding of the first drops of the blood of Jesus.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly beg of Jesus, through Mary, the grace to clothe ourselves with the newness of Christ.

I. THE MYSTERY OF THE DAY.

The liturgy brings to mind two great favours of God, summed up in these two texts : “ *Parvulus natus est nobis* ”—A Child is born to us (Isa. ix. 6)—and “ *Postquam consummati sunt dies octo ut circumcideretur puer, vocatum est nomen ejus Jesus* ”—After eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus (St. Luke ii. 21).

I. *A Child is born to us !*—All other children are born for themselves ; their little tears and wailings

draw attention to their own wants and desires. But this Child had no need to ask of an inferior nature the existence which he enjoyed from all eternity. In the opinion of the majority of theologians, He would not have put on our human nature but for our benefit ; He would not have become incarnate at all if it had not been for the misfortune of our sin. He is born for us, not for Himself ; His desire is to replace, by the offering of Himself, the vain sacrifices of the law and holocausts for sin which were not pleasing to God (Heb. x. 6). For eight days we have had Him with us ; it is no illusion ; the fact of His coming is confirmed by the continuance of His presence.

Let our hearts swell with holy joy at the sight ; let us welcome Him Who comes to us of His goodness in the Name of the Lord.

2. *The Circumcision and the Name of Jesus.*—Oh, the mystery of emancipation contained in humble suffering and shown forth in the sweetest of the names of men ! Mankind needed a double emancipation. The Jews must be liberated from the slavery of the old law, the Gentiles from the slavery of sin and the devil (idolatry), and both must receive the adoption of the sons of God. By His voluntary submission to the Jewish law, while He receives in His flesh the marks of circumcision, Jesus delivers the Jews from their bondage to the law ; and at the same time, in taking our nature upon Him, He sets it free from sin, and gives to us all the adoption of the sons of God. The name of Jesus is the sign of universal salvation, of a salvation which raises us to the dignity of Divine sonship.

II. MARY UNITED TO JESUS IN THIS MYSTERY.

What is more natural for the witnesses of the sacred scene of the Nativity or the Circumcision than to offer pious and loving congratulations to the holy Mother? As the Church in her office exclaims: "O Holy and Immaculate Virginity, I know not with what praises I shall extol thee!" so let us go back in imagination to the moment of these happy events, and join with the Church in offering our congratulations to the Mother of our Saviour.

1. Let us offer them with *joy*, for the happiness of our adoption by God is intimately connected with that of her maternity: Jesus brings us that happiness in being born of Mary. And we celebrate to-day that marvellous intercourse, that sublime exchange in which God receives our humanity and in a certain sense bestows upon us His Divinity.

2. Let us offer them with *gratitude*, for Mary mediates for us. To continue the remarkable comparison authorized by the liturgy, the wonderful exchange by which we obtain the privilege of becoming the sons of God is effected by the intervention of the Blessed Virgin. She consented to bring into the world Him Who was (as she knew) to be the Saviour of His people. If, as St. Luke says, Elizabeth found pleasure in giving to the forerunner of Jesus the name of John, what a joy it must have been to Mary when the sweet Name of Jesus was given to her Son! And when, in the course of the painful rite, the sacred Name was given—oh! then how earnestly did she pray, "May the work of redemption be perfected in me and in all the

world ! May Jesus be really a Saviour to us !” Thus does she begin her part in the redemption of mankind ; already she deserves to be called the Mother of all men !

III. THE MYSTERY IN ITS RELATION TO OURSELVES AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR.

The beginning of a year bids us put on a new spirit—that which our Lord came to bring us, the spirit of the new law. What does it mean ?

1. *Confidence*.—In becoming man and submitting to the yoke of the law, how eloquently God teaches us these two great lessons : our nature, poor as it is, is enabled, when raised by Him, to attain to the sublime end which Infinite Goodness destines for us ; He does not impose upon us any burden which is too heavy for us. This God of love may truly say, “ I have borne it for you, and I have borne it first,” and what powerful encouragement is this !

2. *Liberty*.—Jesus sets us free from the bondage of material observances, of ceremonies devoid of His grace. We have passed the Red Sea of His passion. Let us never again fall under the dominion of the flesh by want of generosity or by giving way to our passions.

3. *The Circumcision of the Heart*.—Instead of a material circumcision, let us offer to God the sacrifice of our unlawful affections, a sacrifice which will procure for us a perpetual union with Him !

4. *Positive Grace*, received after the example of Jesus and Mary, through the merits of Jesus and

the intercession of Mary, with a sweet assurance of their support.

5. *Direction towards God.*—This essential feature is common to the old and the new law. The slave dragged himself towards God. The son should run towards Him.

COLLOQUY.

After giving thanks to Jesus and offering our congratulations to Mary, let us end our meditation by offering our intentions for the new year, and beg the light and help of the Holy Ghost.

Veni, Creator Spiritus !
Come, O Creator, Spirit blest !

THE ESPOUSALS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND ST. JOSEPH

JANUARY 23

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Feast of the Espousals of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph is founded theologically on the Gospel narrative of that union entered into, or at least decided upon, before the message of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, and afterwards formally ratified in the angelic vision which enlightened St. Joseph on the part he was to act in relation to the Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus.

Historically it is connected with the development of the honour paid to St. Joseph. In order to comply with the pious desires of a Canon of Chartres, who had directed in his will that every year on the anniversary of his death the Chapter should solemnly honour the memory of the great patriarch, the celebrated Chancellor Gerson composed an office of the Espousals of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. The office was approved, and the date, January 23, which was chosen for the celebration seems to coincide with the date of the death of the pious founder.

From the seventeenth century the festival was

extended to many countries, and in 1725 Benedict XIII. adopted it for the States of the Church.

The object of the solemnity is clearly indicated by the word *espousals*. We celebrate, not the simple betrothal, but that sacred compact which, without derogating in the least from the virginity of the Queen of Virgins, made of Mary the true and lawful wife of St. Joseph. This event is wholly in honour of the patriarch ; it assigns to him his place in the economy of the redemption and in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the festival is liturgically dedicated to Mary, inasmuch as the commemoration of St. Joseph cannot be made without a special indult (Cong. of Rites, May 5, 1756).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We will consider (1) the *happiness of the married pair* ; (2) the *joy of their friends* ; and (3) the *fruitfulness of their union*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Joseph, fili David, noli timere accipere Mariam conjugem tuam* ”—*Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife* (St. Matt. i. 20).

First Prelude.—Moved by a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Mary had made to God a vow of perpetual virginity. In order, however, to comply with the customs of the time, it was necessary for her to take a husband, and Joseph was the man providentially destined to offer her a heart whose affection would never fail, and a mind sufficiently noble to insure a constant respect for her virginal purity.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the modest home of St. Joseph, in which, to the great

joy of their relations and their common friends, the Blessed Virgin comes to take up her abode.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly beg the grace that we may piously share in the happiness of Mary and Joseph, and may learn from them the secret of true and noble affection.

I. THE HAPPINESS OF THE MARRIED PAIR.

I. The union of Mary and Joseph is a model of holy happy intimacy: like every marriage, it brought two beings into close relationship; but this was by the pure union of two souls; it seemed as if the body had been forgotten.

What a beautiful and useful lesson is given to the world by the happiness of a purely spiritual friendship! We are not asked to renounce the legitimate use of faculties given by God, nor to condemn the sensible satisfactions which, when enjoyed according to the will of the Creator, may even help to draw two souls more closely together, but to show that these satisfactions are not indispensable to happiness; to suggest an ascent towards the higher emotions of the spirit; to enjoin that control over the senses which enables mankind to submit to the privations which necessity at times imposes; to inspire the privileged pair with a constant elevation of heart which shall keep them on the lofty heights on which their chosen vocation has placed them, and enable them to refuse all indulgence of sensuality and the lower appetites.

Let us analyze the happiness of this holy union which joined Mary and Joseph.

(1) What was there which this union did not possess? Certain pleasures concerning which experience teaches us three things:

(a) A person who is unacquainted with them does not miss them. Look at the innocent child and his natural gaiety.

(b) A person who knows them and indulges in them becomes a slave, and is always discontented. The dream is never fully realized; the reality brings disenchantment, and so the dream and the disenchantment are continually alternating: the thirst is excited, but never satisfied.

(c) He who overcomes them, not partially but entirely, no longer regrets their loss. The soul ceases to feel the desire for them, and enjoys the charm of a noble liberty which it never knew before. Read of the struggles and triumphs of St. Augustine.

(2) On the other hand, the affection which is founded on higher motives is more lasting. The foundation is more solid: while the charms of the body, which grow every day less attractive, at last disappear entirely, the higher qualities of the person are more and more developed. Moreover, the man who is capable of such affection is a conqueror, whose character promises a constancy which completes his happiness. Lastly, the happiness is more real and more intense; being that of the better part of our nature, it satisfies more fully our entire being.

2. Let us learn, then, from Mary and Joseph to make ourselves independent of the senses; and, so far as our condition requires or permits, let us cease to crave for the poor consolations of the flesh.

How greatly would our life be ennobled by the attainment of this liberty !

II. THE JOY OF FRIENDS.

1. We shall endeavour, in the second place, to represent to ourselves as vividly as possible the great joy which Mary and Joseph spread around them by entering into this holy alliance. A marriage is always an occasion of festivity, but the marriage of two persons of such lofty character, so perfectly fitted for each other, was bound to cause a more than ordinary joy to all their friends. And yet only the smallest part of the reasons for rejoicing could at that time be known.

2. We, to whom the happy meaning of that marriage is now fully revealed, may turn back in spirit to that happy feast, and address our congratulations first to Mary, who finds in Joseph a faithful friend, a discreet adviser, a devoted protector, a respectful guardian of her virginity ; then, turning to Joseph, let us congratulate him on being found worthy to be associated with the most excellent of all created beings.

It is seemly for us to do this, for—

(1) Children love to keep as a festival the day on which their parents were united before God. Do they not recognize in that union the source of their own existence ? We have the same reason with regard to Mary. God, in uniting her to St. Joseph, prepared her both for her Divine maternity and for her spiritual maternity. St. Joseph, it is true, is not spiritually our father as Mary is our Mother ; and this because he does not share in the

relation of Mary either towards Jesus or towards us, the adopted brothers of Jesus. He had no share in the birth of the Incarnate Word ; he is not like Mary, the recognized mediator of grace and intercession ; yet, being the true and worthy husband of our Mother, he bears towards us the paternal affection which he formerly showed for Jesus.

(2) This chaste union of Mary and Joseph is symbolic of the union of Christ and His Church, to which we all owe our spiritual existence.

(3) The honour given in this marriage to the conjugal state and to virginity gives to us, whatever be our vocation, a real cause of joy.

III. THE FRUITFULNESS OF THIS UNION.

1. The spiritual union of Mary and Joseph had naturally no issue ; nevertheless, it was a pre-ordained condition before the Word of God should be made flesh—the Infant God, Who infinitely surpasses all children who ever came, or ever shall come, into the world, whether taken separately or all together. Viewed in this light, how marvelously fruitful ! We may say, in a certain sense, that we all are the fruit of that union, for, since the Word of God, in forming His natural body, formed also that mystical body of which He Himself was to be the head and we the members, it was one and the same thing to bring forth Christ and to bring forth ourselves, who were to be the members of Christ.

2. This law of spiritual fruitfulness applies to us. Holy relations produce a mutual edification

which makes Christ grow in us, and they insure blessings on the influence which we exercise over our neighbours. Holy Christian virginity, what marvellous fruits are thine every day !

COLLOQUY.

The pious Canon of Chartres thought that whatever he did for St. Joseph would redound to the praise of Mary, as the honour given to Mary would be reflected on Jesus. Let us commence, then, with a loving salutation to St. Joseph to congratulate him, to honour him, to rejoice with him. We shall then go to Mary, and at last reach Jesus, our dear Saviour.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, assist me in my last agony.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, may my soul rest in peace in your holy company.

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The devotion to the Holy Family which had long been practised in the Church has spread throughout the whole world since the seventeenth century. It was general in Italy (especially in the diocese of Bologna), in Belgium, France and Canada. In the Congregation of the Redemptorists there was a very flourishing confraternity under this name. But Leo XIII. gave a new stimulus to the devotion by introducing it into his plan of social reform. Conscious of the dangers which threaten Christian faith and civilization in our days, and desirous of putting an end to the warfare of classes, he thought he could do nothing so well calculated to preserve religion, to assuage strife, and to bring back social peace as by honouring the Holy Family and holding up the example of the modest household of Nazareth to the imitation of the whole world, but principally of the poor and lowly. With this aim in view, the Pope decided to change the pious union of Christian families founded by Father Francoz, S.J., at Lyons in 1861 into a universal association with appropriate statutes. The decree of the Congregation of Rites, dated June 14, 1893, ordered that the

titular feast of the Association should be celebrated on the third Sunday after the Epiphany.

This feast glorifies the mystery of the hidden life of Our Lord, and calls our attention to the domestic virtues which flourished in Jesus and around Him during nearly thirty years of His earthly life. It is not dedicated wholly to Mary, but the Queen of Heaven, as Queen of the home, has an important part in it, and it is therefore included among the feasts of the Blessed Virgin.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In order to fulfil the social purpose with which this solemnity has been instituted, we shall in the first two points of the meditation consider the contrast between the *household of Nazareth*, model of Christian families, and the *family without God*, and in the third point the *means of restoring the Christian spirit in family life*.

MEDITATION.

"Pax Christi exsultet in cordibus vestris"—Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts (Col. iii. 15).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the house of Nazareth, with the workshop of St. Joseph.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to enter into the inner happiness of that hidden life whose virtues we desire to reproduce in ourselves.

I. THE FAMILY OF NAZARETH.

I. (1) As we cross the threshold of this blessed house, we are attracted by the delightfully peaceful atmosphere which fills it. The faces of the inhabitants reflect the real happiness which they enjoy

in their honourable though modest condition. Although all virtues are the common property of the three members of the Holy Family, St. Joseph represents activity and work ; the Blessed Virgin, purity ; Jesus, humility. Jesus is the God Who humbles Himself ; Mary is the creature who is raised above the earth ; Joseph is the man who contentedly fulfils all the duties of his state of life—*vir justus*, the just man of the Gospel (St. Matt. i. 19). How beautiful is this close alliance of humility, purity, and well-ordered labour, which are united that each may be perfect ! Humility lays the foundation of supernatural perfection, and prepares us for the reception of grace ; purity is the first step towards all personal perfection, the flight of the soul above the things of earth ; activity is the source of material prosperity and progress.

(2) Among these three, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, reigns a sweet union. Because they are of one mind as to present duty and the end to which it leads, at Nazareth commands are given without pride, obedience is yielded without reluctance ; there is neither tyranny nor slavery.

This beautiful view of daily life is revealed in a dwelling in which all is purity and order.

2. (1) Let us linger on the beauty of this restful scene. Let us beg to be admitted into this inner life of attractive purity.

(2) Let us endeavour to realize this ideal in our own family ; let us aim at a close union of thought and feeling ; let us enrol ourselves in the association of the Holy Family, and observe the statutes, especially that which prescribes united prayer.

(3) Let us, each and every one of us, remember the great lesson of modesty and humility which is given us. Jesus Who humbles Himself is the same Who said, "Take My yoke upon you, . . . and you shall find rest for your souls" (St. Matt. xi. 29). Peace and happiness are the reward of humility.

II. THE FAMILY WITHOUT GOD.

I. (1) Modern unbelief, ever increasing in boldness, offers another ideal in contrast with this type of the Christian family. It puts aside God, and with God the very reason of humility. Man is no longer guided by a gentle and powerful hand which turns trials and sufferings to good; he is the victim of unlucky chance, he must continually struggle to make a place for himself and gain an advantage over his rivals. Fierce and unending strife takes the place of peace and content.

(2) Here, instead of the due subjection of the wife to her husband, of the child to his father, we see all the members of a family struggling to assert their equality.

(3) With them there is no thought of resignation or sacrifice; present enjoyment and gratification of the senses is all that is aimed at.

(4) Hatred of the rich, envy of the more fortunate, unrest and jealousy, take the place of contentment and peace.

(5) The guiding spirit of the family life is no longer humility, but pride. Happily, established customs offer some resistance to these disinte-

grating forces ; even in the chilly atmosphere of unbelief the force of Christian habits and the voice of Nature itself speak more strongly than these insane pretensions. But what would become of the family if this impious and sensual ideal were allowed to prevail ?

2. (1) The proud man inspires antipathy. Is he happy ? Who is benefited by this impatient and feverish struggle ? Not the restless and discontented man himself, who is tormented by an unsatisfied desire ; nor posterity, for progress is infinite, and there is no reason why the same fever should not consume our descendants. If peace cannot be found after thousands of years, what chance is there of ever finding it ? The members of these anti-Christian families are like Sisyphus—condemned to roll the stone eternally up the hill without ever reaching the summit.

III. THE RESTORATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN FAMILIES.

True charity ought to create in us an interest in the establishment and triumph of the Christian spirit in families.

I. Let us ask ourselves, first, why so many men choose the path most opposed to the Christian spirit and to true happiness.

(1) Pride, in its nature, has a false air of greatness which makes it a seduction for men.

(2) Hypocrisy often brings real virtue into contempt. True virtue unites peace of mind with honest industry and a simple self-respect ; it satisfies the desire which mankind always feels for

progress and advancement. But so many men hide their sloth or incapacity under a virtuous exterior. This sluggishness on the part of those who pass for virtuous persons causes scandal and strengthens the arguments for impiety.

(3) According to Our Blessed Lord's intention, the Christian spirit ought to reign, not only among the poor, but among the rich, whose example should exercise a beneficent social influence, for all superiority is intended by God to teach good lessons. But, unfortunately, instead of Christian modesty, we too often find ostentatious wealth putting on the cloak of religion, and wounding by a haughty demeanour, even if it does not become oppressive by taking advantage of the forced or willing submission of the poor. Such tyranny produces grievances of which the enemies of peace are not slow to take advantage.

2. *Practice*.—(1) We must look not only at the duty of the poor, but also at our own duty. Let us be Christians in heart and soul if we wish to make Christians of others.

(2) Let us use all our influence to put down the double scandal of a cowardly sloth and an arrogant pride taking the name of religion and piety. Let us labour to unite in us and around us a Christian self-respect with Christian humility ; let us impress on the good the necessity for greater energy in their holy work ; and let us do our best to win over to religion sincere minds and noble hearts. By all the means in our power let us preach their obligations to the rich as well as to the poor, and never take part in good works merely for the sake of our own honour and glory.

COLLOQUY.

We shall conclude with a prayer addressed to the three members of the Holy Family, in order to obtain a sincere humility for ourselves and harmony and concord for society.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, enlighten us, help us, save us ! Amen.

THE PURIFICATION

FEBRUARY 2

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Feast of the Purification and the Presentation in the Temple was celebrated in Jerusalem as early as the end of the fourth century. But in the East it is specially a feast of Our Lord, ranking among the principal feasts of the year, while in the West, in spite of the great part left in the liturgy to the mystery of the Presentation, it is for the faithful a feast of Mary.

The Roman Church seems to have approved this feast in the sixth century, in the time of Justinian, or shortly after. It was introduced into Spain in the seventh century, and into France and Germany in the eighth.

The Greeks call it the Feast of the Meeting (*τῆς ὑπαπαντῆς*) of Our Lord, in allusion to the appearance of Simeon and Anna, the prophetess. Christian piety has recognized in these two persons the representatives of the old law coming to pay homage to the Author of the new. In our devotions for the month of May we shall consider more fully the great mystery of the Presentation of Jesus and the Purification of Our Lady ; the meditations for that month will all be found suitable for the

feast of February 2. At present we shall devoutly consider the whole series of facts which make up the mystery, allowing the appropriate reflections to arise spontaneously in our minds, The mixed character of the solemnity will lead us to consider first Jesus, then His Blessed Mother.

CONTEMPLATION.

“Cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus”—His communication is with the simple (Prov. iii. 32).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In the first point we shall think of the *Presentation* and the *Purification*; in the second, the *meeting with Simeon*; in the third, the arrival of Anna, the prophetess.

First Prelude.—On the day fixed by the law the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph modestly went their way towards the Temple of Jerusalem. Mary carries with her the Infant Jesus, to present Him to God His Father, while she herself goes to submit herself to the rite of the Purification. St. Joseph accompanies her: he will make for Mary the offering of the poor, two turtle-doves or two young pigeons. At the threshold of the sacred building a holy old man recognizes the Saviour, and foretells to Mary that this Child, in Himself a source of benedictions, will be contradicted and persecuted, and will become for many, in consequence, the occasion of their fall. A sword will pierce the soul of Mary, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed. A holy widow named Anna appears on the scene, and at the sight of Jesus she feels a great consolation, which she hastens to share with those around her. She

pours out her soul in praise of this Infant, whom she has been allowed to see, to admire, and to love.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves as plainly as we can the road which leads to the Temple of Jerusalem, then the approach to the sacred building and its enclosure.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to know Jesus and Mary better, and to imitate them in their spirit of sacrifice.

I. THE PRESENTATION AND THE PURIFICATION.

Let us give our attention to the following considerations in turn :

1. Does it not seem strange at first to see the simple and modest demeanour which the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph still maintain after the temporal birth of the Divine Word? Nothing is changed in their manner of living or their occupations.

But what earthly splendour could be worthy of the Infinite? In calculating the distance of the stars, the space which separates the two extremities of the orbit in which the earth moves disappears as a negligible quantity. Similarly earthly riches and poverty are of no account in comparison with the majesty of God.

So we, who ought to accustom ourselves to look at things from the Divine point of view, must beware of being influenced by outward appearance, especially in our own surroundings.

2. Mary and Joseph come forward, bearing without blushing the livery of honest poverty.

They do not seek to attract attention. Virtue teaches them to practise this detachment from earthly things, and to cultivate that loftiness of thought which mere human wisdom finds it difficult to understand.

Do we, on whom this theory and practice are clearly enjoined, display a similar greatness of soul? How we strive after luxury and elegance—at least, after as much as is accessible to us in our condition! How artfully we make the most of our little advantages!

3. It costs Mary nothing to appear poor, but it costs her much to appear to have contracted any impurity, even a legal impurity. No humiliation touches her like that. And yet she endures it with patience, and with a modesty which does not seek to draw attention to itself. If other mothers arrived at the Temple at the same hour, no witness could say, “Among these women there is one exempt from the law, who yields to it, nevertheless, a purely voluntary obedience.”

Such is perfect humility which offers all its obedience to God. It goes beyond the mere precept, complies with all common rules, and seeks for no dispensation or exemption. What opportunities are given us for the practice of perfection even in little things!

4. Jesus is presented to His Father. How perfectly He sacrifices Himself in His heart! What a complete offering He makes of Himself to His Father! It is accomplished while He is in the arms of Mary: the Mother ratifies the offering of the Son.

Let us dwell a little on this splendid example of

generosity offered to men in general, and more particularly to parents and children. Man, a creature who has been the object of so much love, can surely only present himself to God to make a generous offering, to offer himself without reserve, without limitation. Yet when there is any question of real sacrifices, of sacrifices which affect something of our own, which render it necessary for us to resign some present satisfaction, some cherished prospect, how unwillingly we give, how often we refuse altogether ! How we, who know all that God has given us, grudge the little that He asks of us in return ! Generosity is perhaps still rarer in parents than in children : an inconsiderate fondness on the part of the parent often closes to the child the noblest career, and the word of Our Lord is fulfilled to the letter : “ A man’s enemies shall be they of his own household ” (St. Matt. x. 36). Is this the way for parents to prove their real affection, or does it conduce to the real happiness of those they love ? Is it not rather betraying a selfish purpose of their own ? Yet God asks for nothing except with the intention to reward most generously. How happily inspired are they who give ! how blessed are they who sacrifice themselves for Him ! Let us rejoice to have something which God seems to desire !

But why should Jesus be redeemed with a price ? Since He intends to be really sacrificed to His Father, one would think that nothing should be offered for His ransom ; but to omit the payment would be to depart from the established custom, and would provoke wonder and criticism. Moreover, He came to “ fulfil all justice ” (St. Matt. iii. 15),

and being perfect Man, to submit to all that is required of men.

But a spiritual application is at the same time suggested to us. Jesus, being wholly His Father's, was to be ours also ; being redeemed with a price, He is, as it were, given back to us. Five sicles are paid for Him.

The smallness of this price well represents the gifts which our humanity gives to God in return for all that it receives from Him. How little are all our gifts ! Let us at least give them cheerfully.

II. THE ARRIVAL OF SIMEON.

1. The Gospel shows us in the aged Simeon a just and scrupulous man in communication with the Holy Spirit. How he rises under this Divine influence, and what consolation he receives !

If we lived really pure and recollected lives, the holy unction of the Spirit of God would fill our souls, transfiguring our lives, our actions, and even our outward appearances. Is not this the stamp of that holiness wherewith those men are marked who are truly devoted to God ?

2. Simeon had received the promise that he should see the Saviour, and now he holds Him in his arms. God gives so much more than He promises.

Let us taste the great and holy joy of the old man, which is more satisfying than all the pleasures of this world.

Let us reflect that a livelier faith would bring us a greater happiness in each of our communions.

Better than being in our arms, Jesus is there in our hearts.

3. "Now," cries the man of God, "Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace." How truly he speaks! The possession of Jesus is the pledge of a peace which can never fail. In Him and with Him we have every assurance, every hope, every blessing.

4. Rising at length to higher considerations, the holy old man seems to see the whole destiny of the human race unfold itself before him: it appears to flow from this offering of Jesus. Salvation is offered to all, accepted by some to their unutterable bliss, refused by others, and thus becoming the occasion of their deepest ruin.

This is the Child set for a sign which shall be contradicted, a prophecy the fulfilment of which continues before our eyes: Jesus is contradicted, and He saves; He is contradicted in His person, in His doctrine, in His disciples, and in His Church, while by His person, His doctrine, His disciples, and His Church He gives salvation.

This thought should console us in the calamities which afflict the Church, and should stir us up to help in the work of salvation, and at the same time should give us matter for reflection: Do not our own thoughts and words and actions contradict Jesus Christ?

5. The contradiction which Jesus meets with brings as its consequence a great sorrow to His Mother. At the close of His prophecy Simeon announces that a sword of grief shall pierce through Mary's heart. The consolation of the Blessed Virgin on earth, then, will never be without sorrow.

Let us be touched by the grief foretold to our Mother.

Unmixed joy does not exist in this world ; we must resolutely give up all idea of finding it here. But joy and pain alike may sanctify us : that is the secret of true wisdom.

III. THE PIOUS WIDOW.

1. Let us admire first the life that pious persons could live even before the coming of Our Lord. How many years has this holy woman given herself up to prayer and mortification ! That is the edifying life which is suitable to her sex and condition ; it is the way of her sanctification ; it is her apostolate.

And yet we, who have the full light of the Gospel, allow ourselves to be left far behind.

2. Anna pays her homage to Our Lord in her own way, *confitebatur, loquebatur* ; she confessed to the Lord, she spoke of Him, says the sacred text ; she did not weary in her words and protestations of love and devotion. God accepts these simple demonstrations. How easy it is to please Him when we truly seek Him !

3. Finally, let us observe with Bossuet how the idea of sacrifice overshadows this mystery—the offering of a dove to be slain, the future offering of the Son of God, the interior sacrifice of Jesus and Mary, the life of sacrifice lived by Simeon and Anna.

The idea of sacrifice is the predominant idea in religion ; it gives purity to the present life, and prepares the joys of the life to come.

COLLOQUY.

At the close of this meditation let us collect the thoughts which have struck us most forcibly, and the resolutions with which they have inspired us. Let us offer them as a garland through Joseph to Mary, and through Mary to Jesus.

FEAST OF THE APPARITION
OF THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN, OUR
LADY OF LOURDES

FEBRUARY 11

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—It may be said that this feast is the work of the Blessed Virgin and the faithful: of the Blessed Virgin pouring forth her favours, of the faithful thronging in thousands to the Basilica of Lourdes, and showing their faith by their enthusiastic fervour.

It would appear that the principal object of the feast, which was granted in 1891 by Leo XIII. at the request of a large number of Bishops, is to show us, in the favours of Our Lady, the reward of the honour paid to her Immaculate Conception.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall consider these favours in the three points of our meditation: (1) *Bodily health*; (2) *the grace of faith*; (3) *the grace of prayer and the supernatural life*.

MEDITATION.

"Fecitque . . . omne genus humanum quærere Deum, quamvis non longe sit ab unoquoque nostrum"
—And God hath made all mankind, . . . that they should seek God . . . although He be not far from every one of us (Acts xvii. 26, 27).

First Prelude.—On February 11, 1858, a modest young girl of fourteen years old, Bernadette Soubirous, saw in the hollow of the rock on the bank of the river at Lourdes the apparition of a lady of heavenly beauty, carrying a rosary on her arm. Being invited to return, she obeyed, and saw the lady again, and on March 25 learned her name. “I am the Immaculate Conception.” When directed to wash in a little muddy water, the child stooped to obey, and a stream of clear water gushed forth. Afterwards, when requested to relate the story of the apparition, in order to induce pilgrims to visit the place and to build a church in honour of the Blessed Virgin, she did as she was desired, and thus procured the erection of a magnificent basilica, and brought together an unprecedented number of pilgrims, first from France and Belgium, then from the rest of Europe, and even from America. The Immaculate Virgin blesses this devotion, and nothing in the world is talked of so much as the miracles at Lourdes. And all this took place only fifty years ago, in our own materialistic and sceptical age.

Second Prelude.—Let us look at the basilica on the top of the rock, the miraculous fountain below, and the Pyrenees in the background.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to live holy lives, safe under the protection of Mary Immaculate.

I. BODILY HEALTH.

I. (1) *The Enormous Number of Cures.*—Let us recall facts which are proved by unimpeachable evidence. Every year immense crowds visit

Lourdes, bringing with them numbers of sick and infirm persons. Every year the annals of the basilica record the accounts of astonishing cures. Does each of these by itself constitute an undoubted miracle? By no means. But such is the good faith of the pilgrims, such the number of persons cured, such the variety of exterior and psychological conditions, such the precautions taken to secure an accurate account of the facts, that no sincere impartial person can avoid the conclusion that miracles do really take place at Lourdes, that there we are brought into contact with the supernatural.

Perhaps we can recall special favours of which we have personal knowledge, or we have had the opportunity of questioning eyewitnesses or persons who have been cured: this remembrance will help to confirm us in our belief in the reality of the occurrences at Lourdes.

Let us thank Mary for her goodness, and rejoice in her glory.

(2) If we reflect, it will not be difficult to find a touching connection between these cures and the Immaculate Conception. Sickness and infirmity, which might be ordinary accidents of our nature, are really the consequence of the first sin, the stain of which was transmitted by Adam to his descendants. These physical evils are, as it were, the last and least cruel of the wounds which the Devil has inflicted upon us. They are destined to disappear when the virtue of Christ's redemption shall complete on the earth itself, on which all things shall be made new (Apoc. xxi. 5), the work of regeneration so happily begun in our souls. By her Immaculate Conception Mary represents

this complete triumph over the Devil and sin. Is it astonishing that she should show her power in curing disease ?

But how much closer is the connection between the Immaculate Conception and moral health ! How much more necessary is a spiritual cure ! Can we any longer doubt the peculiar efficacy of the fervent invocation of Mary in curing our sick and sorrowful souls ?

(3) *These Cures and Unbelief*.—How instructive for the Christian soul is the attitude of unbelieving and misguided persons ! There is no one who has not heard of the cures at Lourdes. The verification of facts is of supreme importance in the interest of truth ; unbelieving persons are invited to come and see for themselves, but there are few who care to take the trouble. They are content to deny the facts *a priori*, or to confine their attention to one class of cures, ignoring or forgetting those cases in which a cure by suggestion is utterly impossible. This indifference is indeed deplorable, but it enables us to understand how Our Blessed Lord Himself, though He multiplied His miracles before the eyes of the Jews, met only with sceptical indifference, ridicule, and even active hostility. Oh for the grace to possess a teachable heart !

2. Let us beg for this favour through Mary, and ask ourselves whether we have given to these facts all the attention they deserve.

II. THE GRACES OF FAITH.

1. Ask the pilgrims who return from Lourdes, and they will describe the display of faith of which

Lourdes is the scene—a display which they can never forget. If some obtain bodily cures, all, so to speak, are spiritually strengthened, and receive the precious grace of an increase of faith ; and what an inestimable blessing is that in this age of darkness and doubt !

So many persons hesitate. How consoling it is to hear the solemn testimony of those who are convinced, and convinced with good reason ! One single miracle destroys the whole of the arguments of unbelief. Have we not, then, at Lourdes a striking confirmation of all that we believe and expect ?

This blessing of faith restored or increased is connected naturally with the high prerogative of Mary. To the faithful soul who says to her, “ I believe in thy Immaculate Conception,” she seems to answer, “ And I will obtain for thee the grace to believe the rest, and will bless thee and those around thee with the graces of faith.”

2. Have we used these means to strengthen our faith, invoking Mary, and begging of her that we may believe firmly and for ever ?

III. THE GRACE OF PRAYER AND THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE.

1. It is not in a limited degree only that we learn at Lourdes to pray and to cultivate a loving familiarity with God and Heaven. When the Blessed Sacrament passes before the sick, the whole crowd of spectators call upon Our Lord as if His Divine person were visible to their eyes. Men talk of Heaven there, men live there the life of Heaven.

What a glorious victory over the spirit of the age! The man of the day, positivist as he is, declares that he can believe nothing but what his eyes can see and his hands can touch; and now, under the influence of the Immaculate Virgin, he is, as it were, raised above the earth, and begins to hope and to look for Heaven.

2. Our prayer must have the accent which the vision of Jesus would give it. Is God, then, far from us? And the virtue of our faith should make us live the life of Heaven, and, while our feet still touch the earth, should raise our hearts on high.

May the devotion to Mary Immaculate produce in us this happy result, and transform us henceforth into citizens of Paradise!

COLLOQUY.

With this intention let us offer our thanksgivings and our fervent prayers.

"Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula originalis non est in te"—Thou art all fair, O Mary, and there is no stain of original sin in thee.

ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY, WHICH WAS FORMERLY
CALLED ANNUNCIATION OF THE
SAVIOUR OR ANNUNCIATION OF CHRIST

MARCH 25

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—On this day of the Annunciation, which is also that of the Incarnation of the Word, we celebrate the beginning and foundation of all Christian joys, and also the reason of all the high prerogatives of Mary. Thrice blessed day when the Son of the Most High took our nature upon Him, and Mary became the Mother of God! Three times each day, in the Angelus at the sound of the bell, we give thanks to God for the mystery accomplished on March 25.

The Feast of the Annunciation is ranked among the most ancient feasts of the Universal Church. We can trace it back to the fifth century in the East, and to the seventh in the West. Leo XIII. raised it to the rank of a double of the first class.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—This sending of an Angel, the choice which God makes of her, naturally raises the question, What charms attracted the Son of God to Mary? According to Bossuet, in the sixth elevation for the twelfth week, we find

three great virtues conspicuous in Mary. The first part of our meditation will be devoted to *admiration of these virtues*, the second to a consideration of the *connection between them*.

MEDITATION.

“*Ave gratia plena*”—*Hail, full of grace* (St. Luke i. 28).

First Prelude.—Let us enter with the Archangel Gabriel into the humble oratory of Mary. The marvellous holiness of the Blessed Virgin spreads a perfume through the little room.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace to know our Mother better, and to understand the holy union of the virtues which adorn her soul.

I. THE VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

1. From her first appearance on the scene the Blessed Virgin is shown to us adorned with the glorious radiance of three virtues : a *perfect purity*, vowed to God, for which she is willing to give up everything according to the Lord's will ; a *humility*, which is exhibited at the moment when the highest honour is conferred upon her ; a *faith*, which believes without hesitation in the most astounding mystery of a virgin bringing forth a child, and that child God Himself.

2. After having done honour to these virtues of Mary, we will endeavour to profit by the three great lessons which she gives us :

(1) To admire chastity. To extol its beauty is not enough in order to ensure its possession ; we

must value it so highly as to think it worthy of any sacrifice.

(2) It is at the moment of success and triumph that humility is most necessary and is most severely tried.

(3) Faith is the more meritorious in proportion as the mystery is difficult of comprehension.

II. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE VIRTUES.

1. (1) The union of these virtues in Mary was neither accidental nor superficial ; one supported and completed the others. If she had been less humble, Mary would not for the sake of her virginity have risked that objection which might have hindered her elevation to the dignity of Mother of God ; if she had been less pure, she would have been less humble ; if her faith had been less perfect, she would have had greater difficulty in sacrificing her humility and her reputation for chastity ; and these two virtues in their turn rendered faith singularly easy.

(2) Moreover, these three virtues united prepared a worthy Mother of God. To taste the ineffable joy of the Divine maternity, Mary had to give up for ever the enjoyment of sensual pleasures ; the most profound humility was necessary to her, that there might be no obstacle to the greatest of all graces from on high ; and, according to the teaching of the Fathers, it was necessary that by a perfect faith she should conceive the Word of God spiritually before communicating to Him the substance of her body.

2. Similarly, in the Christian life these virtues

are joined together in a holy union. Pride is a lust of the spirit, which often receives its just punishment in the lust of the flesh ; and both alike obscure the sight which should see God. " Blessed are the clean of heart ; for they shall see God " (St. Matt. v. 8). Take away pride and the pleasures of sense, and faith will enter freely into the humbled and purified soul.

What useful reflections, what salutary resolutions, this union of virtues should suggest to us ! Let us consider our own needs. Is not the barrenness of our efforts towards the acquisition of some special virtue due to our indifference to some other virtue which is allied to it ? Certain temptations are effectually overcome by the exercise of a virtue which is not attacked ; thus the demon of impurity is put to flight by good acts of humility.

Let us labour to imitate Mary by uniting in our lives these three great virtues of humility, faith, and chastity, for our own sanctification and that of others, " to incorporate the Word in us, and by this incorporation to share in the dignity of the Mother of God " (Bossuet).

COLLOQUY.

Let us address the Angel Gabriel, and with him salute Mary, full of grace ; then let us congratulate the Blessed Virgin on her election and her virtues ; with her and through her let us adore the Word made flesh, and consecrate ourselves to His service. Let us through Mary ask of Jesus that we may become more like our Mother, who is His also.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE SEVEN DOLOURS

FIRST FEAST: THE FRIDAY AFTER PASSION SUNDAY

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—Pope Benedict XIII., by a Decree of April 22, 1727, extended to the whole Church a festival which had been celebrated under various titles and on various dates in many parts of the Christian world. The initiative had been taken by the Council of Cologne, which in 1423, in order to make reparation for the impious iconoclasm of the Hussites, instituted a festival under the title *Festum Commemorationis præfatae angustiae et doloris B. M. V.* (feast of the above-mentioned anguish and sorrow of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

The piety of the faithful was concentrated at first on the anguish which Mary suffered on the last day of Our Lord's passion ; her terrible sufferings at her meeting with her Divine Son carrying His Cross ; then on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, during His agony of three hours ; and lastly, during His burial. By degrees other dolours were added to the list. The devotion to the *Seven Dolours* owes its origin to the piety of Jean de Coudenberghe, a parish priest of Bruges, subsequently secretary to Charles V. Distressed by the horrors of the Civil

War which followed the death of the Duchess of Burgundy (Mary, wife of Maximilian of Austria), he turned for help to the Mother of God, and encouraged others to follow his example. In order to stimulate the devotion of the faithful, he placed in three churches under his charge an image of the Blessed Virgin, with an inscription in verse setting forth the seven chief occasions of Mary's sorrow—namely, the prophecy of the aged Simeon; the flight into Egypt; the loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple; Mary's meeting with Jesus carrying His Cross; her standing by the Cross while Jesus hung thereon; her receiving the sacred body of her Divine Son in her arms; and, lastly, the burial of Jesus. On October 25, 1495, Alexander VI. gave his approval to a confraternity of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, which had been established in Belgium about 1490, and the annals of which testify to the popularity of the devotion in the two provinces of Flanders. The festival of the Seven Dolours was celebrated there, not on the same date as at present, but on the Friday before Passion Week.

Devotion to the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin is, however, much more ancient than the solemnity itself. The city of Florence in 1233 witnessed the foundation of the Order of Servites, devoted specially to Mary and the honouring of her sorrows; and the Church was already in possession of the *Stabat Mater*.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this first meditation, which is made at a time when our pious attention should not be distracted from the agony of Our Saviour, we shall consider the sorrows of Mary

during the passion of her Son, and shall endeavour to meditate on her sufferings united to the sufferings of Jesus. Taking them in order, we shall consider in the three points of our meditation: (1) *Mary standing near the dying Jesus*; (2) *Mary by the side of Jesus after He had been taken down from the Cross*; (3) *Mary by the sepulchre of Jesus*.

MEDITATION.

"Filia Jerusalem . . . magna . . . est velut mare contritio tua"—O daughter of Jerusalem, great as the sea is thy destruction (Lam. ii. 13).

First Prelude.—While Our Lord endured on the Cross for three long hours the most cruel agony of body and soul, Mary, His Mother, standing beneath the Cross, was a witness of His martyrdom. She saw Him afterwards taken down from the Cross, and reverently laid in a new sepulchre belonging to Joseph of Arimathæa.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves Calvary—the three crosses erected upon it, the body of Our Lord, and the adjoining garden, the place of burial.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray for the grace to feel deeply the sufferings of Jesus and Mary, and to obtain thereby a more perfect detachment from sin, with an ardent desire for perfection.

I. MARY BY THE SIDE OF THE DYING JESUS.

I. Let us endeavour to realize the sufferings of Mary at the foot of the Cross, as if the solemn and terrible drama were being enacted before our eyes.

(1) I see at the foot of the Cross the Mother of an only Son : a mother does not separate her cause from that of her son.

(2) That only Son is Our Saviour and Our God. More than any other, Mary has a true mother's soul ; and to her Son, Who is God, she is able to give without reserve all the tenderness of her heart.

(3) How fully she realizes all the sufferings of her Son ! — the *bodily pain* and thirst, without the power to give the least relief ; the *insults* offered to Him. If Saints were wounded by the blasphemies uttered against Our Lord, how much more so was Mary, who knew better than any other what was due to Jesus Christ ! Consider what insults she hears, and to Whom they are addressed ! The suffering caused to His Divine Heart by an ingratitude which insults the Benefactor in His most magnificent gifts, and then by a cowardice which at the suprememoment, after the most solemn promises, abandons the most generous of Fathers. And above the Cross a God Who allows His Son to suffer and to be insulted. O unfathomable mystery of justice and love ! What must have been the agony of Mary !

2. Let us learn from Mary true compassion with the sufferings of Christ. Ought we not to mourn over the indifference with which we look on the pains which He suffered for us and for our salvation ? Let us implore Mary to soften our hearts and to excite in us a real tenderness for her dear Son Jesus.

II. MARY BY THE BODY OF JESUS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS.

1. The last recommendation made by Jesus to His Mother—"Behold thy son"—and to St. John—"Behold thy Mother"—contained a pathetic farewell, which soon became a terrible reality. The dying Jesus utters a cry which rends the heart of His Mother; His head falls forward on His breast, and all is over. There remains only the pious duty of the burial. The nails are carefully removed, and the body taken down from the Cross. Where should it be laid? What arms are more fit to receive it than those of Mary? These arms are extended as if by instinct, and embrace the body of the dead Saviour.

2. Let us kneel before Mary, and contemplate all the wounds whose bloody marks remain on the cold body. Let us say slowly:

*"Ave verum corpus natum
Ex Maria Virgine:
Vere passum, immolatum
In cruce pro homine."*

"Hail to thee! true Body, sprung
From the Virgin Mary's womb:
The same that on the Cross was hung
And bore for man the bitter doom."

From the sorrows of Jesus let us turn our thoughts to the sorrows of Mary. Thirty-three years before she had held on her knees the Infant God, the most beautiful of the sons of men. What has become of Him? What have we done with Him? Ah! the contrast is due to my sins. Mother, we cannot comprehend thy sorrow, but we can at least comprehend our duty to sympathize with it. We must

suffer with thee ; we must more than ever detest sin as the only cause of thy affliction. We must draw from thy suffering a burning zeal for the salvation of souls, with a full trust in the Divine mercy. O Mother, before whom I strike my breast, obtain for me this fruit of a solid devotion, that I may live for thee and for thy Son Jesus !

III. MARY BY THE SEPULCHRE OF JESUS.

1. The hour is come when Mary must suffer the body of her Son to be taken away from her. The law of the Sabbath, which she will obey to the letter, urges her to make haste. The funeral procession is organized ; the angels take part in it. On the earth we see the disciples carrying the body ; then the Blessed Virgin, supported by St. John ; then the holy women. Let us join them. The procession moves on in solemn silence ; everyone is bowed down with deepest grief.

2. While the sacred body of Jesus is being laid in the sepulchre, let us meditate on the tender love of Our Divine Lord, Who, being resolved to show Himself like us in all things, except sin, is willing even to pass through the grave, the final humiliation of fallen humanity. Let us make an act of submission to the will of God, and of acceptance of death ; but when all seems to be over, let our faith and hope point us to the beginning of a better life.

Then let us think of the solitude of the Blessed Virgin when the sad ceremony is over. Humanly speaking, she is without consolation, for what can St. John do to fill the place of her Son ? Yet if

her sorrow is great, great also is her holy fortitude.

Let our admiration for our holy Mother lead us to imitate her in our own trials, which are so much less than those that she endured.

COLLOQUY.

Let us offer our affectionate compassion to our Mother, who has suffered so much for our sakes, and thank her for her love, which her sorrows serve only to increase. In return for her goodness, we will share with St. John the tender duty towards her entrusted to him by our dying Saviour; we will beg her to accept our homage, and to obtain for us the grace piously to keep our resolution. In conclusion, let us recite the *Stabat Mater*, or, at least, a part of that hymn.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL

APRIL 26

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—This feast puts before us one of the most honoured images of Christendom. The smiling Madonna, holding her Infant Son on her arm, has her sanctuary in the ancient Villa Claudiana, the modern Genazzano, not far from Palestrina. The devotion rests, as in many other cases, on a poetical legend for which there is little historical evidence, but which is pleasant to read and meditate upon, because it puts before us in concrete form a fact of which we are fully persuaded—the power of Mary and her maternal solicitude. The Madonna of Genazzano is said to have been miraculously transported from Albania into Italy, accompanying across the Adriatic two Christians who fled from the Mussulman invasion, and to have been attached to the inner wall of the church served by the Augustinian Fathers, arriving at the time of the local fair, April 25, 1467.

To come to historical dates, the image was crowned by the Chapter of the Vatican Basilica in 1682, and the title of Our Lady of Good Counsel also dates from the seventeenth century. Pius VI., on September 18, 1789, extended to the whole

Order of Hermits of St. Augustine the feast granted to Genazzano from July 12, 1727, transferring the solemnity to April 26 on account of the Feast of St. Mark, which falls on the 25th. At the present time the Office and Mass are extended to almost the whole of the Latin Church. Leo XIII. gave a new importance to this festival when, shortly before his death, he ordered the invocation of the Mother of Good Counsel to be inserted in the Litany of Loreto.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In the three points of this meditation we shall consider in succession *the importance of good counsel, the possession of this gift by Mary, and the means by which we can develop it in ourselves.*

MEDITATION.

“*Beatus homo qui audit me*”—*Blessed is the man that heareth Me* (Prov. viii. 34).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine ourselves in the presence of the Blessed Virgin at the moment when she is deliberating on the proposal made to her by the Archangel Gabriel.

Second Prelude.—Let us implore the Blessed Virgin to obtain for us the precious gift of good counsel, and to teach us how to value it.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COUNSEL.

I. Good counsel is a judicious application of general principles to particular cases. In the different circumstances of life it shows us the proper line of conduct to follow, the side to take, and it is

an indispensable element of practical wisdom. We are only concerned now with the moral and supernatural order. The gift of good counsel serves to lead us and others in paths of justice, in order that we may arrive at the fullness of spiritual development, at the summit of that perfection to which the grace of God invites us to ascend.

Even in worldly affairs a wise counsellor is an inestimable blessing, and few qualities give a man such influence and authority over others as the capacity to give good advice; how highly, then, we should value the supernatural wisdom which guides us to the true goal of our existence! But it is of little use to know the most excellent principles if we do not know how to put them into practice. The clearest knowledge of truth, if we merely possess it without acting upon it, will serve only to increase the weight of our responsibility.

Moreover, do we not continually feel the need of this practical knowledge, both for ourselves and for others?

2. Let us call to mind our doubts, hesitations, difficulties, and mistakes of the past, and excite in ourselves a great desire to possess the art and the gift of good counsel, making humble confession of our need, and imploring God and the Blessed Virgin to come to our assistance.

II. THE GIFT OF GOOD COUNSEL IN MARY.

1. What wealth of good counsel Mary possessed! Was there ever a created being to whom more important questions were submitted for decision? It was left to Mary to decide by her consent the

question of our redemption ; she had to live a life worthy of the Mother of God. With what good counsel was she adorned who alone among pure creatures fully realized the designs of God upon her, attaining to that actual perfection which was according to His will ! Look at the whole life of the Blessed Virgin : what a gift and what grace of good counsel were manifested in the vow of virginity that she offered to God ; in the choice of St. Joseph as her husband and protector ; in her reception of the Angel Gabriel ; in the attitude of simplicity and humility which she maintained during the hidden life and the public life of Our Lord ; in her presence on Calvary ; and afterwards in her relations with the Apostles after Our Lord's Resurrection and Ascension ! At the time of the descent of the Holy Ghost the Gospel shows these pillars of the Church ranged round Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

2. If we think of all the questions which Mary was called upon to decide during her whole life, we shall regard her with deep admiration. The Queen of Saba, who came to Jerusalem after hearing of the renown of Solomon, returned full of wonder at the wise answers she received from him : the reality far surpassed her expectation.

Similarly, the mere reputation of the Blessed Virgin for wisdom will not produce such an impression upon us as a study of the facts which show in how high a degree she possessed that great gift.

III. THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING THE GIFT OF GOOD COUNSEL.

Since we are interested only in its supernatural results, we should remember that practical wisdom must be the gift of God. But we must co-operate with God, and use to the best advantage the other graces which dispose us to receive this gift.

To this end it will be most useful—

1. To strengthen in us the great principles of the higher life: the more completely our whole being is saturated by these principles, the more safely we shall be guided on all occasions when guidance is needed.

2. To endeavour to be masters of ourselves and our passions: a tranquil mind is necessary for wise deliberations.

3. To resist and drive out disorderly affections, which often influence us without our being aware of the fact.

4. To have great respect for the judgment of others—above all, for that of our superiors—and to listen willingly to rebuke. This humility, which is not without trust in Providence, is blessed by God, and leads us naturally to wisdom: it is most imprudent to trust only to our own light, and despise the warnings of others.

5. To be recollected and circumspect—recollected, in order to hear the Word of God; circumspect, in order to follow it with discretion.

6. To be humble and detached from created things. Even in the natural order, to insure a sound decision, we require the competence to judge which can only come from long experience, a careful

examination of the question at issue, and an unbiassed mind. The vain man hides his incompetence, seeks only to please, and gives his opinion without due consideration ; the interested man is liable to the suspicion of partiality. In the supernatural order vanity gives too little glory to God to merit His grace, and a disorderly affection is an impurity.

If we cultivate these dispositions, God, by Himself or His Angels, will condescend to be our watchful adviser, whose hand, though hidden, will guide us safely in difficulties and dangers.

COLLOQUY.

Let us turn with confidence to Mary, and invoke her with fervour to obtain the gift of good counsel. We shall formulate our special requests according to our troubles and necessities ; whatever they may be, let us lay them all before her as dutiful children before their mother.

Ave Maria.

FEAST OF MARY, MOTHER OF THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

FIRST SUNDAY IN MAY

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Capuchin Fathers of Seville commenced to celebrate, on the second Sunday after Easter, under the title of the Mother of the Divine Shepherd, a feast of the Blessed Virgin, which Pius VII. extended to Tuscany, from whence it spread over the greater part of Italy ; the dates of the celebration have been frequently changed. Pius IX. gave his approbation to a new Office in order, as he said, to draw the humble and grateful attention of the faithful to the care with which the Blessed Virgin watches over them, and the heavenly food for which they are indebted to her.

There are two things to be considered in connection with this festival: Mary is the Mother of the Good Shepherd, and she delights to bring His sheep to Him. Happy to be of His flock, we extend our gratitude to the Mother of Jesus, and thank her for having led us to His side ; and then we implore her to take care that we may never again lose this dear Shepherd of our souls.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Understood in this manner, this festival appeals to our faith, our love, and our dearest interest. We shall consider it under these three aspects for the glory of Jesus and Mary, and for the greater good of our souls.

MEDITATION.

“*Cognosco meas, et cognoscunt me meæ*”—*I know Mine, and Mine know Me* (St. John x. 14).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the affecting scene described in the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, where Our Lord speaks to His disciples and the multitude the Parable of the Good Shepherd, Who is Himself.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask, through the intercession of Mary, that we may always be of the number of those sheep who are faithfully attached to their Good Shepherd.

I. THE VOICE OF FAITH.

I. One truth is clearly suggested by the Feast of Mary, Mother of the Good Shepherd, and our faith confirms it : mankind has need of a shepherd, and finds one only in Jesus. Experience teaches us, if we put aside the few persons who in their pride think themselves independent of the help of others, that we cannot travel through life unaided. Men by themselves know neither the goal to which they are journeying, nor the means by which it is to be attained, and must therefore have someone to lead them. Jesus, Who sees their need and loves them,

Who alone is both able and willing to help them, offers Himself as their guide.

“ No man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended from heaven, the Son of man Who is in heaven ” (St. John iii. 13). And who else has made the sacrifice of his life as a pledge of his love ? Neither before nor after Jesus has there been anyone who has had the knowledge, the power, and the love required. Put Jesus aside, and what other guide is left ? Poor men, without union, without authority, without fixity of purpose, often merely ambitious and selfish hirelings. In our own day, as well as in His own lifetime on earth, Our Lord may well look down with a sad and compassionate eye on the multitude of those who are not of His flock, and say : “ They are like sheep that have no shepherd ” (St. Matt. ix. 36). It is in vain for unbelief to criticize and object ; it is convicted of error and falsehood, for it can give us nothing in place of Jesus. Vigorous spiritual life is the sure result and sign of the possession of the truth ; we cannot really grasp the truth if we are inert and apathetic.

2. When specious objections are raised against religion, and when we are assailed by interior and exterior temptations, instead of contenting ourselves with a defensive attitude, let us ask, What is offered in exchange for the dogmas of the Faith—what is offered, and on what evidence, and under what sanctions ? So weak and foolish these manifold systems will soon appear, which profess to have been invented for the salvation of mankind, that we shall reject all these false Christs, and take our stand with fervent gratitude by the side of

the true Christ, repeating lovingly the hymn which has so often and so sweetly echoed in our ears :

*" Tu nos pasce, nos tuere,
Tu nos bona fac videre
In terra viventium."*

" Oh, feed us still ; still keep us Thine,
So may we see Thy glories shine
In fields of immortality."

II. THE VOICE OF LOVE.

1. Happy to possess and follow Jesus, if we obey the promptings of our hearts, we shall turn with gratitude towards her who has given Him to us.

(1) Mary gave Him *to us all in general* when she brought Him into the world ; she gave Him to us when she deprived herself of His society through the whole course of that public life during which the Good Shepherd went far from His Mother in search of His sheep ; she gave Him to us, finally, when she consented to the bloody sacrifice of Her Son upon the cross.

2. Has she not also given Him *to each of us in particular* ? Do not the most obstinate sinners owe it to the Mother of Mercy, to some devotion which they have practised in honour of Mary, that they have been of the number of those wandering sheep which the Good Shepherd has carried lovingly on His shoulders to the sheepfold ? Is not the purity which keeps a young man true to Jesus the fruit of a special devotion towards the Queen of Virgins ? And do not monks and nuns recognize at the root of the vocation which binds them more closely to Jesus the influence of their piety towards the Queen of All Saints ?

3. Let us recall to mind the instances in which such acts of devotion have saved us from vice, or kept us in the path of virtue, or led us further towards perfection. To what sweet pastures the Mother of the Good Shepherd has brought us ! Let us take pleasure in reminding her of it, and thanking her for her care.

III. THE VOICE OF OUR DEAREST INTEREST.

1. Our own interest warns us on this festival to place our virtue and our perfection under the patronage of Mary. Whether we are afraid of being led away from the fold of Jesus, or have, to our sorrow, been already enticed away from it, or are filled with desire to follow Our Divine Shepherd to those sweet pastures which He reserves for His favoured sheep, let us have recourse to His Mother. She will make sure our faithfulness, our return, our progress, our sanctification.

2. Are we occupied with good works ? Do opportunities for zeal present themselves ? Do we desire the conversion of others ? Let us recommend our efforts to the Mother of Our Divine Shepherd.

COLLOQUY.

Let us tell our loving Mother of all the spiritual interests which are dearest to our hearts ; then we shall go with more confidence through her to Jesus, the Divine and loving Shepherd of our souls.

Anima Christi, sanctifica me.
Ave Maria.

FEAST OF OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

MAY 24

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—On May 24, 1814, after six years of exile and captivity, Pope Pius VII., contrary to all expectation, triumphantly re-entered his city of Rome. A powerful Emperor had taken him prisoner, had dragged him across Europe, and then banished him to Savona, thinking, perhaps, in his pride as an invincible conqueror, that his sword would give the final blow to the citadel of the true Faith, already undermined by a sceptical philosophy. But his ambitious power was destroyed, and the Pontiff returned, with the approval of monarchs, amid the plaudits of his people. In this victory Pius VII. saw the protecting hand of Mary, and in his gratitude he directed that the day of his return should be kept as the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians. This name had been suggested to him by one of the invocations in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. After the glorious battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571, St. Pius V., in thanksgiving for a victory which had delivered Christianity from the Mussulman terror, had ordered that the beautiful title of Help of Christians should be added to the Litany.

The feast was instituted for the Roman States by the Decree of Rites of September 16, 1815, and before long its extension was asked for by nearly the whole of the Catholic world. Like the Feast of the Rosary, it has special reference to the struggles of Christianity; but while the Rosary recalls happy victories, Mary, Help of Christians, reminds us of distress relieved and calamities averted.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Let us in this meditation reflect on the position of the Christian in this world, and the help that he may hope for from Mary, putting before us (1) the misfortunes of the Church, the cause of our trouble; (2) our consolation in the midst of these trials; (3) the reasons why we should have recourse to Mary.

MEDITATION.

"Cum ipso sum in tribulatione"—*I am with him in tribulation* (Ps. xc. 15).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the scene of the flight into Egypt, Mary carrying Jesus in her arms, and fleeing to escape from the pursuit of Herod and his satellites.

Second Prelude.—Let us beg the grace to share piously in the trials of the Church, and to offer to Mary those prayers full of confidence which are so pleasing to her.

I. THE SORROW OF THE CHRISTIAN IN THE TRIALS OF THE CHURCH.

1. We need not make any long search in the annals of the Church to find that at all periods of her history her zealous pastors and faithful people

have had to deplore misfortunes peculiar to the times. The age of violent persecutions, already troubled by the rashness of innovators and the cowardice of lukewarm Christians, was succeeded by the first period of formal and dangerous heresies. Prosperity produced ambition and corruptions within, while the consolidation of royal power gave birth to jealous rivalries and various attempts to enslave the Church. From these abuses arose the great Protestant heresy, which leads to absolute infidelity and hatred of all religious authority.

2. The good Christian cannot but be deeply touched by these tribulations of the Church.

(1) What happiness is marred or ruined by heresy! What blessings does the faithful observance of the law of Christ bring down upon individuals and nations! The Christian knows this way of salvation, and he sees it discredited by the conduct of unworthy brethren, and rejected by blind and obstinate rebels.

(2) Would that the warfare of evil against good were fought with fair weapons! But the arms employed against the Church are a new cause of trouble. Shameless and treacherous calumnies draw unthinking persons into the ranks of the enemies of the Church. Vice insolently puts on the outward appearance of virtue, and succeeds under this mask in gaining public favour, while virtue is scoffed at and misunderstood. Oh, the folly and ingratitude of Europe!

(3) But, above all, the spiritual ruin which threatens so many souls, many of them still innocent, is the cause of bitter pain to every Christian heart. What becomes of the poor? What

becomes of the dying? Above all, what becomes of so many children given over to schools of impiety or indifference?

3. Let us sympathize with the misfortunes of the Church, that we may there find motives for fervour and zeal and generosity.

II. THE CONSOLATION OF THE CHRISTIAN IN THE MIDST OF THESE TRIALS.

1. Faith gives the best of all consolations, for it shows the Christian:—

(1) *Above him*, God, Christ, and His Mother in unchangeable glory and perfect happiness. The Christian rejoices that it is impossible for the powers of evil to disturb this happiness and this glory.

(2) *In the past*, the same Christ entering into His glory by the shameful way of Calvary, showing forth by the sufferings of His humanity the destiny of His mystical body, predicting plainly the hatred and slander to which that body will be exposed. "You shall be hated by all men, and they shall speak all that is evil against you untruly for My sake. When they shall hate you, remember that I first was the object of their hatred" (see St. Matt. v. 11, x. 22, xxiv. 9).

(3) *In the future*, a final and complete triumph reserved for Christ and His cause. Even the silence of death, burying His enemies in an oblivion which shall show the vanity of their pretensions, will not be enough to satisfy the Divine vengeance. All will be compelled to confess their error, and to bow the knee before Christ.

(4) *While we are waiting*, the accomplishment of the designs of God, the benefit which good men derive from these crosses, and for the Christian himself a perfect security. "Man is restless, but God leads him," says Fénelon. It is in vain for men to conspire against the Christian; they cannot hinder him from believing and loving.

2. Let us examine ourselves, and see what our conduct has been in the midst of the trials of the Church. Has it hitherto been inspired by the spirit of faith? Have we had sufficient confidence? Have we never given way to doubt and discouragement? "*Modicæ fidei, quare dubitasti?*" Our Lord might ask us—"Oh, thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" (St. Matt. xiv. 31).

III. RECOURSE TO MARY.

The Duty of going to Mary for Help.—The consolations of the Christian would cease to be real if they brought about a selfish indifference to the welfare of others, and his personal safety would be endangered if they led him to trust in his own strength. For the sake of charity and prudence, we must in trouble have recourse to one who is able to help us.

Recourse to Mary.—In this appeal for help, how can we omit to address ourselves to Mary? Think of all the care with which this good Mother watched over her persecuted Child. Outward tribulations are the livery of Christ. He was never inwardly tempted, but He suffered hatred and persecution. In the midst of tribulations, the Christian is another Christ-child, and the Mother of Christ will

not fail to extend to His disciples the same love and tender care which she showed to Christ Himself, in Whose steps they follow here below.

COLLOQUY.

Having laid before Mary our own dangers and those which threaten the Church, let us conclude our humble address to the glorious protectress of the faithful with this beautiful prayer :

*" Maria mater gratiæ,
Mater misericordiæ ;
Tu nos ab hoste protege,
Et mortis hora suscipe."*

" Mother of Grace, oh, Mary blest,
To thee, sweet fount of love, we cry ;
Shield us through life, and take us hence
To thy dear bosom when we die."

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART

MAY 31

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—On December 8, 1854, the very day on which Pius IX. proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, two young priests of Issoudun—Messieurs Jules Chevalier and Maugenest—finished a novena in honour of the Blessed Virgin which was to decide the question of their life and their apostolate. Devoted since their seminary days to the glory of the Sacred Heart and the honour of the Immaculate Mother of God, both had long thought of founding in the town of Issoudun a congregation consecrated to the Heart of Jesus. When they found themselves appointed, one after the other, to serve in the same town, their thoughts returned to the same project, which seemed, humanly speaking, to be impossible of realization. Then they turned to Mary for light and help, feeling sure that, on that happy day on which the proclamation of the new dogma was to fill up the measure of her glory, she would deign to show her approval of their design by providing them with the means to make a beginning of their work. In return for the favour, they promised to consecrate themselves to the

Heart of Jesus under the name of *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart*, and to procure a special honour for Mary.

At the conclusion of the High Mass a resident of the town presented himself at the sacristy, offering on the part of some person who desired to remain unknown the sum of 20,000 francs to establish at Issoudun a good work of some kind, preferably a society of missionary priests.

On September 9, 1855, the first members of the new congregation received officially the title of *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart*. It only remained to fulfil the rest of the promise, and to honour Mary in some special manner. After many prayers, the founder, Rev. Father Chevalier, felt impelled to invoke the Blessed Virgin under the new title of *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*. This invocation, inscribed for the first time on the pedestal of a statue of the Immaculate Virgin, became the title under which Mary received, in 1860, the dedication of an altar in the first church of the Order. In 1864 the Archbishop of Bourges approved the statutes and signed the charter of a confraternity in honour of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. On May 31, 1865, the association, under the authority of a pontifical brief of June 7, 1864, celebrated for the first time its patronal feast. This date of May 31 had been designedly chosen : the day which concluded the month of Mary and ushered in the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was admirably suited to celebrate the union of the two devotions, which is a characteristic of the spirit of missionaries of the Sacred Heart. From April 26, 1879, the confraternity, by a pontifical concession,

became a universal arch-confraternity. On November 12, 1881, Leo XIII. introduced the feast into the calendar of the congregation, and assigned to it the Office and the Mass *Beatæ Virginis Matris gratiarum*, already granted to the Society of Mary.

At the present day the devotion is approved by more than 450 Archbishops and Bishops ; and the confraternities of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart number millions of associates. Not to mention affiliated confraternities and many independent associations, the arch-confraternity of Issoudun in 1903 bore on its rolls the names of 18,000,000 members.

The name of *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart* expresses directly the special intercessory power which the Blessed Virgin possesses with her Divine Son. It is in virtue of this all-powerful intercession that men have recourse to Mary as their patroness in difficult and desperate cases. Her clients desire to honour her as the dispenser of the graces of the Sacraments, and at the same time to recognize in her a sharer in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The meditations for Saturdays, which will be found in the third part of this work, will lead us to reflect on the intercessory power of the Blessed Virgin, and her character as mediatrix of grace ; at present we shall content ourselves with putting prominently forward the union of Mary Immaculate and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the third note of the homage rendered to Mary by the title of *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*. The three points of the meditation will be : (1) *The*

natural and physical likeness of the two hearts of Jesus and Mary ; (2) *their moral and supernatural likeness* ; (3) *the union of the two devotions* to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin.

MEDITATION.

"Hoc enim sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu"—For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. ii. 5).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves Mary holding in her arms the Infant Jesus. With maternal tenderness, mingled with reverence, she fixes her eyes upon her Son, Who is overflowing with bounty and love.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly beg the great grace to unite in our lives an ardent love of Mary Immaculate and a profound devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I. PHYSICAL AND NATURAL LIKENESS OF THE TWO HEARTS.

I. What a great natural and physical likeness there is between the Heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary ! It was Mary who from her own pure flesh supplied the substance of the body and the Heart of Jesus, as all mothers do, and yet more than all mothers, because Jesus had no father among men. What a priceless honour for Mary, the more exalted because it is through this that she is called the Mother of God !

Not only did Our Lord consent to receive His holy body from Mary, but He accepted in it His

likeness to her. His features recalled those of His Mother ; His temperament and the inclinations of His heart were the temperament and the inclinations of Mary, and of her alone and entirely, because no man had any share in forming Him. Does not this spectacle speak to our hearts—Jesus, the living image of Mary, recalling and reproducing her features and her character ? Does it not touch us ? Does it not excite in us a profound admiration for the honour conferred on Mary, and the condescension of God towards our humanity ?

2. We cannot resemble Mary in all her circumstances, but she has shown us how we may follow her example. If she was happy to give her body and her life to form the body and the life of Our Lord, we also, in our turn, can spend our strength, our health, our lives for Jesus. Let us rejoice in the privilege which is given us, and let us never forget that in working and suffering for Him we shall have the honour of helping to form His likeness in others.

II. MORAL AND SUPERNATURAL LIKENESS OF THE TWO HEARTS.

1. Jesus, looking upon His Mother, saw in her one who imitated Him most perfectly, who kept all His words in her heart, whose will was one with His own. Between these two hearts was exemplified a perfect concord and unanimity such as existed nowhere else—the harmony of two hearts beating as one, the moral unity of souls in two separate existences. And, as if to complete the likeness between them, Jesus chose the heart of His

Mother, that he might pour into it the fullness of communicable graces which were found in Himself. Modelled physically after Mary, Jesus, by a sublime exchange, became morally and supernaturally the model of His blessed Mother.

2. St. Paul long ago urged us to "let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus"; and how should this likeness specially appear? In meekness and humility. Jesus humbled Himself—"*Humiliavit seipsum*" (Phil. ii. 8)—and He has described Himself in these words: "I am meek and humble of heart"—"*Mitis sum et humilis corde*" (St. Matt. xi. 29).

Do we seriously endeavour to render ourselves inwardly conformable to Our Lord and Saviour? Let us make haste to acquire this glorious likeness.

III. THE UNION OF THE TWO DEVOTIONS.

1. Let us consider the close union of these two devotions.

(1) Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is in its end subordinate to that paid to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. All true devotion to Mary should lead us to Jesus, Who is glorified by the honour given to His Mother.

(2) If we consider the influence they exert on our lives, we shall see that these two devotions complete and perfect each other. The Christian has need of confidence and energy. Weak as he is, he must be supported, encouraged, consoled. As the disciple of Jesus, he must deny himself. In his mature age he has still the wants of a little child, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the

milk of little children, while devotion to the Sacred Heart is the strong meat of perfect men.

(3) Mary leads us to Jesus. The whole desire of this perfect Mother is to make men honour and follow her Son. The homage which is offered to her would cease to please her if it did not draw men to Jesus. What is the devotion to the Sacred Heart? It is the worship of a love sacrificed on Calvary, consummated in the Holy Eucharist, and rewarded with deplorable ingratitude. Who realized the Passion of Christ as Mary did? Who communicated better than she? Who understood and bewailed the ingratitude of men as she did, who at the foot of the Cross was a witness of the blasphemies of her Son's enemies, the careless indifference of the soldiers, and the shameful cowardice of His disciples?

2. Let us see whether our devotion to Mary makes us more faithful disciples of Jesus. We can never regard it as opposed to the devotion to Jesus, if we remember that Mary herself is one of the works and one of the gifts of His Sacred Heart.

COLLOQUY.

Let us conclude by addressing ourselves with confidence to Jesus and Mary, entrusting to them all our difficult and desperate causes, and let us piously recite the *Memorare*.

FEAST OF MARY, MOTHER OF DIVINE GRACE

JUNE 9

[N.B.—This Meditation is equally appropriate to the Feast of the *Miraculous Medal*, which is celebrated on January 20, and to the Feast of the *Virgin Mother of Fair Love*, which has been kept in Spain since 1877 on May 31. On the anniversary of the day on which it was approved, April 29, 1836, the priests of the *Society of Mary* say a special Mass and Office in honour of *Mary, Mother of Divine Grace*, which have been extended to the *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* for their Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.]

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Feast of Mary, Mother of Divine Grace, should lead us to reflect on the spiritual maternity which makes of us all true children of Mary. But this great subject is reserved for the Meditations for Saturdays, and for the present we shall content ourselves with the general idea suggested by the feast—that of the numerous graces which come to us through Mary.

The Madonnas which represent Mary as the Mother of Divine Grace are countless, so dear is

this name to Christians, to whom it recalls the fullness of grace which Mary enjoys, and which she causes to be reflected on us.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—With this thought in our minds, we shall consider the graces we ask for as being (1) *granted by God*, (2) *merited by Jesus Christ*, and (3) *obtained by Mary*. The first point will enable us to understand what we are asking for ; the second will impress upon us the high value we should attach to the graces of God ; the third will increase our confidence.

MEDITATION.

“ *Petite, et accipietis* ”—*Ask, and you shall receive* (St. John xvi. 24).

First Prelude.—Let us picture Mary as she is represented on one side of the miraculous medal. Her outstretched hands send forth rays which typify the graces poured out by her upon the world.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask that we may value the graces of God as we ought, and may put more confidence in Mary.

I. THE GRACE GRANTED BY GOD.

I. Why is this name of *graces* commonly given to all the favours which we ask of God ? Apparently to make it clear that they are free gifts, bestowed gratuitously without any merit of our own. This is a great truth. Let us make its meaning clear.

(1) The gifts of God are gratuitously given to us all in this sense—that our first good action is the result of an antecedent grace of God. We did not

create ourselves, and it is only by means of the gifts of God that we are able to serve Him.

(2) We continually require new graces in addition. Our innumerable faults and sins constitute a positive guilt, and a gratuitous gift of Divine mercy must be added to the former grace.

(3) These truths are obvious, but there is something more to which our attention must be directed—namely, the destination of graces. All God's gifts are regulated in view of an end, which surpasses in importance all created nature. The most perfect of angelic creatures unaided is absolutely incapable of putting himself into the disposition to receive a favour which, if considered as a reward, is out of all proportion to any service done, and to which creatures can make no claim. The object, in fact, for which the favour is conferred, is the happiness of God Himself communicated to a finite being, and it is to be noted not only that this is the object of those sublime graces which are proper to the supernatural order, such as sanctifying grace, faith, hope, charity, etc., but that even in the affairs of our present life God does not will anything, does not grant or permit anything, which cannot serve towards this end. Nothing is granted that is not meant to serve some useful purpose ; nothing can be asked for except with the same intention.

Such is the law—a law of holiness, of dignity, of happiness. To ask for any other purpose would be unworthy of God and of ourselves.

The prayer of a Christian, even when it relates to such things as health, fortune, or worldly success, is offered with the desire to receive these

blessings only as means to serve God, to glorify Him supernaturally, and to approach nearer to Him. This is what is meant by that conformity to the Will of God which we are taught to maintain in our temporal desires. All else is useless, trivial, worthless.

2. (1) The absolute gratuitousness of God's gifts ought to inspire us with a great humility in our requests.

(2) Have we hitherto understood the real meaning and the real object of our petitions? Let us henceforth act up to this command of God, and let us desire nothing except as a means, direct or indirect, towards the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Let us cease to contradict by our attitude, by our impatience or secret discontent, the true lofty signification of Christian prayer.

II. THE GRACE MERITED BY JESUS CHRIST.

1. The supernatural destination of every gift of God shows us at the same time that the fountain of God's bounty pours out all its waters through the channel of Jesus Christ. Every Divine gift is merited by Him. God gives it to us, as it were, empurpled with the blood of His only Son.

2. (1) With what respect and veneration ought we not to receive the least gifts of God!

(2) If Our Lord has endured so much to merit these graces for us, do we not understand that God expects from us some persevering effort that we may benefit by them? And shall we not at least willingly offer the labour of continual fervent prayer in order to obtain them?

III. THE GRACE OBTAINED BY THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

1. Let us imagine the many prayers which rise to the throne of Mary, and the countless favours which descend from it unceasingly. The New World agrees with the Old. The intercessions of Mary are inscribed in the names of temples, of religious orders, of cities. The Blessed Virgin delights to answer the prayers even of those who are not in the true fold, if only they invoke her powerful intercession with simple faith. All kinds of favours are referred to her, her power, and her goodness.

2. Let us make use of a comparison to explain this universal benevolence. Suppose a person immensely rich, in need of nothing, and extremely well-disposed towards us. With what success we appeal to such a benefactor, if our requests are becoming, and made with confidence! That is the case with the Blessed Virgin. Let us add that her riches are not diminished by being spread abroad.

Henceforth let us not be wanting in confidence, but let us persevere steadily in the earnest supplications which true piety suggests to us. God only delays in order to give better; Mary only delays in order to obtain more.

COLLOQUY.

We shall naturally add to our thanksgiving a fervent prayer, in which we shall tell our wants, first to Mary, then to Jesus, and lastly to God the Father. The *Memorare* may be appropriately recited after our invocation of the Blessed Virgin.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE STREET (MADONNA DELLA STRADA)

SECOND SUNDAY IN JUNE

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—In the centre of Rome, near the road leading to the Capitol, there was formerly a small parish church of the fifteenth, or perhaps of the fourteenth century, which had over the high altar a picture of the Blessed Virgin with the Infant Jesus, which a clever artist had painted on the wall some time during the fifteenth century. The little church was ordinarily known as *Santa Maria degli Astalli*, from the name of the founders, or, later, *della Strada* (of the street), and sometimes as *Santa Maria degli Altieri*, from the square of that name in the immediate neighbourhood.

Towards the end of the year 1538 St. Ignatius of Loyola, who had been in Rome since October, 1537, established himself in the vicinity of this church, and adopted the habit of saying Mass at the altar of the Madonna. Being struck by the convenient situation of the little church, he desired to obtain possession of it for his Society, and succeeded in doing so on June 24, 1541, thanks to the intervention of the first Italian Jesuit, Peter Codacio, who a year before had been appointed Rector of the parish.

About 1570 the church, after many partial restorations, was pulled down, and replaced by the magnificent temple of the Gesù. The Madonna before which Ignatius, Francis Borgia, Canisius, and so many other illustrious persons had said Mass or prayed was fixed upon a panel, and a rich and splendidly decorated chapel was set apart for it in the new church. Thither Mary drew the faithful, encouraging by countless favours a devotion which increased throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The pious Canon of St. Peter's, Count Alexander Sforza, who originated the practice of the solemn coronation of images, conferred this honour on the Madonna della Strada on August 15, 1638 ; the ceremony was then performed for the third time. Despoiled of her rich ornaments during the troubles of the end of the eighteenth century, the Madonna received new and even greater honours from her children of the nineteenth. The Chapter of the Vatican Basilica decorated the image with a new crown of gold on June 14, 1885, during the celebration of the third centenary of its installation in the chapel of the church.

Such is the simple history of this statue. The devotion of the members of the Society of Jesus prompted them to ask for a proper Mass and Office, which were granted by Leo XIII. on January 19, 1900.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this meditation we shall consider the title of *Our Lady of the Street*, remembering that the picture was formerly fixed on the wall of a house by the side of the road trodden by the crowd. We will reflect in turn upon (1) the *thoughts* of the passing crowd ; (2) the

real needs of that crowd ; and (3) the words addressed to the crowd by the Blessed Virgin before whom it passes.

MEDITATION.

“ In me gratia omnis viæ ”—*In me is all grace of the way* (Ecclus. xxiv. 25).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine a simple but devotional image of the Madonna with the Infant Jesus fixed on the wall of a house by the side of the public road.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray that, by the aid of our devotion to the Mother of Christ, we may always follow the true way, which is Jesus.

I. THE THOUGHTS OF THE PASSING CROWD.

I. Men pass in crowds along the frequented streets of the city, some hurrying about their business, others loitering as if they had nothing to do ; some absorbed by their thoughts, their schemes, their cares, others seeking in the objects around them or in the persons who pass by something to occupy their attention. Among them are men in search of employment, beggars asking for bread, men who seek to captivate the popular favour, and interested flatterers who hang on to the powerful personages of the day : rich and poor, influential and obscure, they pass by, for the most part unknown, or at least indifferent, to each other. Some exchange a passing salute, or stop for a moment to press each other's hands.

How many in this crowd care to busy themselves about their most important interests, or to keep

themselves free from other preoccupations to look after the concerns of their souls? Are they not carried away by vanity, which leaves no room in their minds for any serious thought? Some are urged on by the restless desire to succeed in business, in some lucrative undertaking; while others lounge idly through life, squandering the precious hours which will never come back to them. The unhappy think too little of their future consolation; the happy forget moderation and generosity. What a disregard of their eternal interests!

2. (1) The first effect of such a sight as this should be to convince us more fully of the vanity of this world.

(2) Then let us seriously ask ourselves:

(a) Do we rise above temporal cares?

(b) Do we not waste our time?

(c) Do we bear ourselves bravely in adversity like true Christians?

(d) Do we think of religion in prosperity?

(e) Do we recognize our brethren in those who pass by?

II. THE REAL NEEDS OF THE CROWD.

1. In the midst of this tumult, this mad rush, these hopes and disappointments, these alternations of success and failure, this crowd knows not what it is running after, and, for want of this knowledge, loses its time and trouble. It thirsts for truth and life—for truth, because intelligence desires knowledge; for life, because all nature has a horror of death. But we must understand that truth does not mean all speculative science does

not mean throwing light on all the details of the endless problems offered to our puny efforts for solution ; and life does not mean this present existence, which is destined inevitably to be put an end to by death. We want a truth which shall control our life, and a life which shall be regulated in conformity with truth. We must live truly, and not for the sake of appearances : the cares, the affairs which engage the attention of these men, do not contain this truth or this life ; and that is why these men go astray. All these things can only distract, amuse, dazzle ; and amusements and distractions are unworthy of the name of life. We must look at life as it really is, considering its short duration, its good and evil fortune, its manifold accidents, and utilize it according to a fitting and worthy plan which the shortness of life, its changes and chances, cannot frustrate.

2. Let us realize thoroughly what are the conditions of a life which is worthy of the name, and let us put aside everything that might hinder us from fulfilling them ; thus we shall be really free, and shall save ourselves from useless regrets in the future.

III. THE BLESSED VIRGIN SPEAKING TO THE CROWD.

1. As I pass along the street in company with this crowd, I raise my eyes to the picture of a mother whom the painter has endeavoured to represent as fair, gentle, calm, happy, and pious. The serenity of the Madonna is in striking contrast with the hurry of these men, her smile with their tears, the active energy depicted on her features with their sloth, her cheering benevolence with their

weary and hopeless indifference. In her look we read her thoughts, and easily divine what is the source from which she derives her goodness and tranquillity. Her gaze rests upon the Child whom she carries in her arms ; that Child is Jesus—Jesus, Who has said, “ I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life ” (St. John xiv. 6)—that is to say, “ I am the Way to the true life ; I have the true life ; I am that Life, and I lead others to it.”

2. Here, then, is found the secret of life and truth : to fill our life with Jesus Christ ; to live for Him, to live by Him. *To live for Him*—that is, to study His interests instead of our own ; attending to our own affairs, bringing up our children, fulfilling our social duties, all for His sake : is not all this in the purpose of God destined to glorify Christ ? *To live by Him*—that is to say, to strengthen ourselves by His teaching and His example. When sooner or later we die, we can, with Garcia Moreno, hurl this defiance at death—“ God never dies ” ; He can never be defeated.

COLLOQUY.

Let us kneel before an image of Mary, and entreat the Mother of God to guide our steps, and lead us to that true life which is her Son Jesus.

“ *Vitam præsta puram,
Iter para tutum ;
Ut videntes Jesum
Semper collætémur.*”

“ Still as on we journey,
Help our weak endeavour ;
Till with thee and Jesus
We rejoice for ever.”

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR

*SUNDAY BEFORE THE FEAST OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST,
JUNE 24*

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—In a chapel in the Via Merulana at Rome there lay abandoned an old painting of the Blessed Virgin, brought, it is said, from the island of Crete at the end of the fifteenth century, which had been held in great veneration in the Church of St. Matthew the Apostle, now in ruins. One Saturday in February, 1863, Father Blosi, S.J., preaching at the Gesù on the Blessed Virgin, made mention of this picture, saying that Mary desired to see it rescued from oblivion. The Redemptorist Fathers realized this desire. As soon as they had obtained possession of the picture, they took it to their Church of St. Alphonsus, and exposed it to public veneration on June 19, 1866. A few years sufficed to spread far and wide the renown of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Struck by the devotion of the faithful and its beautiful results, Pius IX. granted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer permission to celebrate the Feast of the Blessed Virgin with proper Mass and Office on the Sunday nearest to the Feast of St. John the Baptist; that day recalled the solemn coronation of the Madonna

by the Chapter of the Vatican Basilica on June 23, 1867.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall meditate first on *our never-ending wants*, and next on the *never-ending help* which we find in Mary; and in conclusion we will invoke her aid by dwelling on the words of the *Memorare*.

MEDITATION.

“Oportet semper orare et non deficere”—We ought always to pray, and not to faint (St. Luke xviii. 1).

First Prelude.—Let us call to mind either the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, or the Blessed Virgin interceding for us in the glory of Heaven.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to combine a lively consciousness of our needs with an unwearied confidence in Jesus and Mary.

I. OUR NEVER-ENDING NEEDS.

I. It is both useful and easy to realize our perpetual need. In the never-ending necessities of our bodies have we not a sign and an image of the perpetual necessities of our souls? At any moment some enemy may strike us down, some misfortune may overwhelm us. Being constantly in need, we never cease to call for help. It is the express command of Our Lord Himself: “We ought always to pray, and not to faint.” We ought always to pray without ever losing courage.

We are continually in want of help of all kinds,

not only for our bodies, but for our souls and spirits ; not only for ourselves, but for those who are near and dear to us, and all those in whom we are interested.

2. Let us keep alive in us this feeling of our perpetual need.

II. THE NEVER-ENDING HELP.

1. There is nothing so consoling to us in our troubles as the knowledge that we have in Mary a protectress who is always ready to hasten to our aid, and it is easy to prove this.

(1) Mary is associated with Jesus Christ in the work of redemption. St. Paul shows us Jesus in the midst of His glory always living to make intercession for us. "*Semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis*" (Heb. vii. 25). He lives in Heaven to plead our cause for ever, and let us never doubt that to the intercession of Jesus is joined the constant supplication of Mary.

(2) What do we learn from that part of the *Hail Mary* which is the work of the Church ? At every hour of the day or night, as in all possible circumstances, the faithful may say, " Pray for us *now*."

(3) Saints have borne striking testimony to this truth, for some of them have prayed thus : " O my God, grant me the favour that Mary is asking for me at this moment."

2. Let us learn to offer continual prayer to Jesus and Mary. What does continual prayer mean ? It does not mean that we should neglect all our business for prayer, but that whenever we are conscious of need or danger, we should at once

raise our eyes to Heaven and call for help. "*Levavi oculos meos ad montes, unde veniet auxilium mihi*"—I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me (Ps. cxx. 1). Let us lift up our eyes to Heaven, and see Mary by the side of Jesus, and look for help from them.

III. THE MEMORARE.

Let us slowly recite this prayer, which so well expresses the sentiments which we seek to keep in our minds by this meditation, weighing well the meaning of the principal words, and dwelling upon them as long as we are inclined.

"*Memorare*"—*Remember*. Mary never forgets. It is we who need to be reminded, in order to prepare ourselves for her favours.

"*O piissima*"—*O most gracious*. This expression indicates the affection she feels for us as our Mother and protectress.

"*Virgo Maria*"—*Virgin Mary*. Mary is Queen of virgins, pre-eminent above all others.

"*Non esse auditum a sæculo*"—*that never was it known*. What force is there in this expression! *Never!* It challenges us to find any exception.

"*Quemquam*"—*anyone*. No matter who he may be, Saint or sinner.

"*Ad tua currentem præsidia, tua implorantem auxilia, tua petentem suffragia*"—*who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession*. These words denote at the same time the fervour of our invocations and the manner in which Mary comes to our aid. *Fled, implored, sought*—thus we describe the promptness of our applica-

tion, the urgency of our entreaties, the humility of our prayer. *Protection, help, intercession.* These words mean that Mary herself must ask and obtain for us, but that her prayer is a help because it is sure to be heard.

“*Esse derelictum*”—*was left unaided.* To be left unaided by one's Mother! Could we think of such a thing as possible?

“*Ego, tali animatus confidentia*”—*inspired with this confidence.* We lay aside all doubt and hesitation, adopting as our own the confidence which is expressed in the preceding words.

“*Ad te, Virgo virginum, Mater*”—*unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.* These are the two great titles of Mary united in one petition. Her perfect purity, which renders her an object of admiration to all virgins, gives force to her intercession; her Divine maternity gives her the right to be heard.

“*Curro, ad te venio*”—*I fly, I come to thee.* Thus we express our own impatient eagerness.

“*Coram te gemens peccator*”—*before thee sinful and sorrowful.* We must have humility to recognize our faults, but these faults do not make our appeal of no effect if we detest them and are not hardened in them.

“*Assisto*”—*I stand.* I stand before the feet of Mary, waiting with patience and assurance for her aid.

“*Noli, Mater Verbi, verba mea despicere*”—*O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions.* We invoke her power, for she is the Mother of the Word, of that living Word of God, by Whom all things were made, and Who never

deceives us. We know that although our requests are not worthy of her attention, our Mother will never despise them, and that we have only to put into words what we wish to ask.

"Sed audi propitia et exaudi"—but in thy clemency hear and answer me. We end our prayer and our meditation with a renewed profession of our confidence in Mary, her goodness, and her power

THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

JULY 2

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—While the Church, rent by the great schism of the West, was labouring under the most painful of its trials, the thoughts of the Sovereign Pontiff were turned towards Mary. He reflected what comfort and what sanctification the visit of the Mother of God had brought of old to the house of Zachary, and he hoped that she would do as much for the whole Church, when it was in such need of strength and sanctification. Moved by the necessities of the flock of which he was the Shepherd, and strong in this hope, Urban VI. on April 6, 1389, passed a Decree, which was promulgated on November 9 of the same year by his successor, Boniface IX., establishing the festival of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin in the whole of the Latin Church. At the end of the schism the institution of the feast was confirmed by the Council of Bâle, in the hope of giving more complete peace to the Church, and was maintained by the lawful Popes. Pius IX. raised it to the rank of a double of the second class on May 31, 1850, in memory of his return from Gaeta and the deliverance of the city of Rome,

which happy event had taken place on the Feast of the Visitation in the previous year.

The feast had, moreover, been celebrated in earlier times by particular Churches. It is mentioned for the first time in the statutes of Le Mans in 1247, and it was kept among the Franciscans at least as early as 1263.

July 2 was chosen for the feast, because about that time Mary terminated her visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. The date of her arrival at the house of Zachary could not conveniently have been chosen, as, coming shortly after the Feast of the Annunciation, it would almost always fall within the season of Lent.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this feast Christian piety considers Mary as the channel of a sanctifying grace which gives peace and consolation. Elizabeth's visitor is the Mother of grace and comforter of the afflicted. We shall make this the subject of our meditation, and consider (1) *the sanctification of St. John the Baptist*; (2) *that of Elizabeth*; and (3) *that of Mary herself*.

MEDITATION.

"Exsultavit infans"—*The infant leaped in her womb* (St. Luke i. 41).

First Prelude.—Let us call to mind the Gospel narrative of the Visitation, taking specially into account all the consoling circumstances of the mystery. Setting out in all haste immediately after the message of Gabriel, Mary arrived at her cousin's house and saluted her. At this salutation, St. John the Baptist in the womb of his mother felt

a thrill which, according to Catholic tradition, indicated the sanctifying grace which at that moment cleansed him from the stain of original sin. St. Elizabeth also was filled with the Holy Ghost, and could not restrain her joy, but cried out in a loud voice to congratulate her cousin on the dignity which had been conferred upon her, and to express her own delight at receiving the Mother of her Lord under her roof. Mary in turn poured forth her joy in her song of gratitude, the *Magnificat*.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the house of Zachary, where Mary and Elizabeth met.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask for this great grace, to be consoled ourselves and to spread around us that peace-making influence which characterizes the action of the children of God. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” says Our Lord, “for they shall be called the children of God” (St. Matt. v. 9).

I. THE SANCTIFICATION OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

I. Jesus, carried by His Mother, sanctifies His forerunner, and gives him thereby a cause of ineffable joy and consolation. Till that moment stained and soiled, the soul of the Baptist was all at once made to shine with a radiance which it was never more to lose. And this incomparable radiance was at the same time a sublime dignity. Wait for the first dawn of reason, and see with what a burst of love this friend of the Bridegroom (St. John iii. 29), this greatest of all the prophets (St. Luke vii. 28), will offer his whole heart to his God. Oh, sweet charity, which thus unites man to God! Such is the consolation which Our Lord

brought by Mary to John the Baptist and to the whole world.

But at this moment the germ of this celestial joy is implanted in the soul of a child who knows neither its beauty nor its excellence. John does not understand this transport of gladness which fills him.

2. (1) Are not we all who are borne in the womb of one Mother, Holy Church, represented by St. John the Baptist? The beauty, the dignity of grace and charity are poured out upon us, and it is in our power to preserve them for ever. But as yet we do not fully appreciate all the splendour of these gifts. What enthusiasm will fill our souls when our vision is cleared! Let us meditate on these words of St. John: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is" (1 St. John iii. 1, 2). And the beloved disciple adds: "And everyone that hath this hope in Him sanctifieth himself, as He also is holy."

(2) This great consolation of charity, if we understand it ever so little, will suffice for us now, and we shall refuse to live for any other pleasure whatever.

II. THE SANCTIFICATION OF ELIZABETH.

I. 1. Elizabeth felt an unspeakable joy at receiving the visit of her cousin, at hearing the voice of Mary's salutation. She felt what a high honour

was conferred upon her. The grace of the Holy Spirit follows the steps of the Mother of God, and the sweet kindness of the Blessed Virgin adds present consolation to the delightful hopes for the future.

2. "*Beati pacifici!*"—"Blessed are the peacemakers!" There are some men who possess the inestimable gift of bringing comfort and encouragement to others, who open to others the prospect, sweet even in the present, of loving God through all eternity. It is a talent which is perhaps not given to all. It means an entire forgetfulness of one's own cares, one's own affairs and interests, and an extraordinary love of God. And by this way of renunciation all will have some part in this gift, which allows so much good to be realized. Let us reflect how much it will have cost us at the end of a year to show a pleasant face to everyone, and, on the other hand, what a salutary effect it will have upon ourselves to have given a cordial welcome to all. We shall see that the sacrifice of time and trouble is as nothing in comparison with the good results they may produce.

II. In our sadness and desolation let us turn with confidence to Mary. She is able and willing to console us.

III. THE SANCTIFICATION OF MARY.

I. These blessings of which Mary is a witness fill her with a great gratitude, which increases her grace, her merit, and her happiness. Mary shares the satisfaction of her cousin, but she tells us she enjoys it in the Lord, Who perpetuates her glad-

ness. "*Exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo*"—"My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

2. In all this mystery of the Visitation Mary has never thought of herself. But look at her happiness! The word of Jesus Christ is fulfilled: "It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). Let us consider well the meaning and the importance of that sentence. Should we not have the courage to attempt to put it into practice? Jesus does not deceive us. What happiness we should find in forgetfulness of ourselves!

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask Mary to obtain for us a holy tranquillity of soul, and the grace of bringing to many sore and afflicted hearts the sweet peace of God. Let us pray her to give peace and holiness to the Church. Through Mary we will ask the same graces of Jesus Christ, and conclude by saying with our holy Mother the *Magnificat* of Christian hope and gratitude.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

JULY 16

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is a solemn commemoration of gratitude. The day has been consecrated to the Blessed Virgin by the great Carmelite Order, as their Martyrology informs us, as a sign of their devotion, and in recognition of the innumerable favours for which they are indebted to her ; and the whole Christian world, clothed in the scapular of Mount Carmel, shares in this gratitude, as it has long shared in the trust which the Order places in its heavenly patroness and benefactress. Pope Sixtus V. gave official approbation to this feast, which was first kept in the Order about 1387. It was extended to the States of the King of Spain on November 21, 1674, and in the following year to those of the Emperor of Austria. Portugal received it in 1679. It passed in 1725 to the Pontifical States, and was made a feast of the Universal Church by a Decree of Benedict XIII. dated September 24, 1726. By a Brief of May 16, 1892, Leo XIII. extended to the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel the distinguished privilege of Portiuncula, hitherto peculiar

to the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels. A plenary indulgence, applicable to the souls in Purgatory, may be gained by the faithful every time that they visit a Carmelite Church on July 16, after having confessed their sins and received Holy Communion, provided that they pray for some time according to the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—On this day of thanksgiving our attention is naturally turned to the holy scapular. We shall consider it (1) as a badge of affiliation to the Confraternity of Mount Carmel; (2) as an outward sign of devotion to the Blessed Virgin; and (3) we shall inquire what is the proper manner of wearing this holy habit.

MEDITATION.

“*Ipsi videbunt gloriam Domini, et decorem Dei nostri*”—They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the beauty of our God (Isa. xxxv. 2).

First Prelude.—Let us picture Mary as a majestic Queen, but full of benevolence, who looks down with special loving-kindness on religious and other persons who are devoted to her service.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to foster an ardent and steadfast devotion towards the Blessed Virgin which will enable us to wear her livery piously and with benefit to ourselves.

I. THE SCAPULAR A BADGE OF AFFILIATION.

I. The scapulars in their original form resemble partially and on a small scale the habit of a religious order. They are due to the very natural desire to denote by some outward sign the affilia-

tion of the faithful, who are attached to some religious order by having their names enrolled in its confraternity. These scapulars, then, are the symbol of a bond between the religious and the laity. They show on the part of the faithful a desire to fraternize with those who have made public profession of the counsels of Jesus Christ, and on the part of the religious a desire to make persons living in the world sharers in the good works and merits of their Order.

This honour rendered to the religious life is a touching mark of faith. It shows in members of religious orders men blessed by God and capable of drawing down the choicest favours on their friends. This is the holy law of the Communion of Saints which enables all the faithful to share in the sacrifices, prayers, and good works performed in the Church, joining Heaven to earth, the past to the present and the future; for these merits, united to those of Christ, are for ever deposited in the treasury of the Christian society. The distribution of these spiritual treasures gives us occasion to admire the condescending kindness of God, Who blesses the special bonds which bring men closer together.

2. This community of benefits should excite our gratitude to the kind Providence of God, and to Christ, Who is always so full of generosity to His Spouse, the Church. But does it not contain other very useful lessons?

(1) Does it not invite us to draw closer the bonds of that charity which should make brothers of all Christians?

(2) Does it not move the faithful to love and

admiration for those whom the Church consecrates to God by the vows of religion? Not to speak of the special services rendered to humanity by the rule of the different orders, what a blessing it is in those cities, where men are given up to levity and vice, to have some souls engaged in prayer and works of expiation! How many evils have been removed, how many graces granted, in answer to the prayers and sacrifices of religious!

(3) As to the religious, does not this same community of benefits inspire them with a great affection for their vocation, which makes of them the privileged children of Jesus and Mary? There is scarcely a single religious of any order who does not enjoy the feeling that he lives safe under the mantle of the Mother of God.

But at the same time she urges them not to disappoint the expectations of the faithful, but to render themselves worthy of their confidence by a truly fervent and holy life. There is a well-known form of hypocrisy, which consists in cloaking bad intentions and wicked actions under the habit of religion; but the man who sets himself up in the name of the Church as an imitator of Jesus Christ ought not to be content with an ordinary or common standard of virtue.

II. THE SCAPULAR A SIGN OF DEVOTION.

I. The Order of Mount Carmel is entirely devoted to Mary, and the badge of affiliation to that order is, similarly, a sign of devotion to the Mother of God and of men. The devotion to the scapular is encouraged by the richest rewards, for on all

sides we hear of favours received through wearing it. And the Sovereign Pontiffs approve and encourage the pious belief which induces the faithful to wear the scapular as a pledge of salvation, and when accompanied by some other devotions, as a pledge of early deliverance from Purgatory.

Why, someone may ask, should there be this connection between spiritual graces and this external badge?

1. The answer is easy, if we think what human nature is: the innermost thoughts of the mind can only be made known by outward manifestation. The visible act is worth nothing without the inward intention, but it is difficult to believe in the latter without some outward sign. In the world great personages put their servants into livery; monarchs attach to the breasts of their subjects the marks of the honours and distinctions they confer. Everyone understands that a ribbon, a collar, or a cross is a thing insignificant in itself, and is valued only as a badge of valour or distinguished service. What is there, then, unworthy or ridiculous in wearing the scapular to show our devotion and our hope? We wear it as valiant soldiers of our Queen.

2. To this consideration may be added another and a graver one, which connects this use of material things with the original sin of Adam and the sins of men. Man, undisputed king of all creatures, by his sin makes himself their slave, and at the same time makes them accomplices of his rebellion against his Creator: God in return compels man to seek the aid of creatures to find Him; He makes this help necessary by attaching His

grace to it. Hence the ancient bondage which subjected the people of Israel to the empty ceremonies of the old law—empty indeed (although the Jews could not omit them without sin), because, unlike our Sacraments, they neither contained nor conferred the grace which justifies before God. Christ, in setting us free from these ceremonies, wishes us to sanctify ourselves by other outward observances, by which we receive the benefit of His blood and His grace—viz., the Sacraments. The Sacraments only are of Divine institution, but the Church, following the example of her Divine Head, and strong in the power she holds from Him, has instituted and approved certain external rites, which she honours with her benediction, and which are a form of humble homage accepted by the Saints and by God. These are known by the general name of sacramentals, and among them we include the scapular.

II. Let us, in the spirit of simple humility, put on the livery of Mary. We must not look upon the scapular as a talisman operating by some magic virtue of its own, but rather as a manifestation of piety which derives all its value from the benevolence of the Blessed Virgin : it has the blessing of the Church, and is the homage of respectful affection, of filial confidence, and continual supplication.

III. HOW TO WEAR THE HOLY HABIT.

I. The scapular derives its efficacy from the action of the Church, which approves and blesses it, and from the gracious power of Mary. We are therefore bound—

1. To observe exactly the orders of the Church as to the form of the scapular, the manner of wearing it, and the prayers to be recited. A disregard of these rules would not show broad-mindedness, but want of faith and obedience, and would put us outside the conditions necessary to enable us to benefit by a sacramental practice.

2. Above all, to enter into the spirit of the devotion by showing a genuine respect and affection towards the Blessed Virgin. Devotion to Mary may be shown without the scapular, but the scapular is useless without devotion to Mary. The scapular, if accompanied by the proper intentions, proves the efficacy of devotion to Our Lady, and nothing else. It is an application of the proverb, "A child of Mary can never be lost."

II. Let us see whether we have this perfect disposition, which consists in interior devotion, and does not disdain external aid. There is no spiritual blessing we could desire which is not to be obtained by humble and sincere piety.

COLLOQUY.

Let us thank our Mother in Heaven for the many proofs of her constant protection. Let us wear the scapular with simple humility, and show a confidence which, as it grows, will assure to us more and more the effects of a devotion that we know to be salutary; and, full of gratitude and spiritual joy, we will end our invocation of Mary by fervently reciting the *Magnificat*.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS

AUGUST 2 OR 15

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—This feast recalls the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, known as Portiuncula, situated near the little town of Assisi. This sanctuary, venerable by its antiquity, was a favourite resort of St. Francis of Assisi, who had spared no pains to restore it. In this temple, dedicated to the Queen of Angels, his faith was rewarded by frequent visits of celestial spirits ; moreover, the place was endeared to him as having witnessed his first practice of humility, and his progress in all kinds of virtues towards perfection. When he was dying, he recommended the place to his brethren as very dear to the Blessed Virgin. The Church of Our Lady of the Angels became celebrated throughout the world by the famous plenary indulgence of Portiuncula, of which we can find certain traces as far back as 1277.

A decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites of June 10, 1690, gave permission to the three orders of St. Francis to celebrate on August 2 the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels as their principal patroness ; elsewhere, unless a special indult be granted, the commemoration of this title of the Blessed Virgin is made on the Feast of the Assumption,

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The name of Our Lady of the Angels suggests our meditation, and we shall consider the relations between Mary and the holy Angels. But as her relations with her guardian Angel will form the subject of special meditation in the third part of this book, we shall confine our reflections at present to the relations of Mary and the Angels (1) *at the Annunciation*; (2) *at the birth of Our Lord and the flight into Egypt*; and (3) *in the mystery of the Assumption*.

MEDITATION.

“Missus est Angelus Gabriel a Deo . . . ad virginem . . . et nomen Virginis Maria”—*The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin, and the Virgin’s name was Mary* (St. Luke i. 26, 27).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the throne of Mary in Heaven, surrounded by legions of celestial spirits; and with them let us offer to our dear Mother the tribute of our love.

Second Prelude.—Let us beg for the grace to imitate the virtues of the Queen of Angels on earth, in order that one day we may find our reward with all her faithful servants in the midst of the Angels in Heaven.

I. MARY AND THE ANGEL OF THE ANNUNCIATION.

I. What an edifying spectacle is set before us in this scene, in which Mary and the heavenly messenger seem, as it were, to vie with each other in their exhibition of perfect humility!

1. In the Angel we admire the complete absence

of envy. Pure spirit as he is, he bows with reverence before a human creature ; nay, more, he shows a holy eagerness in delivering his message which is to place her infinitely above himself, and thus he works for the exaltation of another according to the will of God.

2. The humility of Mary knows no vain glory ; at the moment when this immense honour is held out to her she thinks of one thing only—the happiness of serving God. “ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ! ”

II. 1. How difficult it is for man, however wise he may be, to get rid of all feeling of envy ! Envy is nothing but greatness sought, not in one’s own deserts, but in the humiliation of another. The envious man does not rise—he is often incapable of it—but he wishes that another may fall, and this feeling is the cause of all kinds of meanness. Let us fully understand the baseness of such behaviour, and, to drive all such thoughts from our minds, let us remember that there is only one kind of happiness worth caring for—the happiness which is eternal—and that we shall enjoy that equally whether we have it alone, or whether others have an equal share, or even a greater share than ourselves.

2. Not less vain is the feeling of self-satisfaction in success, from which Our Lady was so entirely free. Long ago the famous words were spoken, “ All is vanity, except to love God and to serve Him only,” and yet forgetfulness of this maxim is the source of all our disappointments. Let us read again chapter vii. of the first Book of the “ Imitation.”

II. MARY AND THE ANGELS OF THE NATIVITY, AND THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

I. The Angels of the Nativity sang on the hills near Bethlehem ; their hearers were humble and simple shepherds. It was to St. Joseph that the Angel appeared to warn the Holy Family of the persecution of Herod, and afterwards to tell them that it was time to return to their own country ; but this circumstance deserves our consideration : Mary paid the same attention to these indirect communications from on high as to the message sent directly to herself. She sought only the will of God, and not her own consolation. As to the things that were told her by the shepherds, the Gospel (St. Luke ii. 19) informs us that " Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart," and the order to rise instantly to go into exile or to return to her country, whether communicated through Joseph or heard directly by herself, was carried out with the same submission, the same ready obedience.

II. 1. If Mary, in spite of her incomparable dignity and holiness, was content to receive the message of God through others ; if she was willing to pay St. Joseph the same deference that any wife owes to her husband, how much more are we bound to put away from us that pride which would lead us to rely only on our own intelligence, and to reject as superfluous all counsel and direction from others. Let us take to heart the teaching of Leo XIII. : " The common law of Providence has decreed that men shall generally be saved by other men, and that men shall serve as guides

even to those whom God has called to a higher degree of holiness, in order, as St. Chrysostom says, that God may teach us by human lips."

2. Among those whom God is pleased to use as His instruments we recognize first our lawful superiors, especially those to whom we submit ourselves to be led to God. The confidence, therefore, of those religious who are animated by the spirit of faith is well founded, and will never be disappointed. God leads them by the orders of their Superiors. That view of faith gives peace, and at the same time it dignifies obedience, which is rendered, not to man, but to God.

III. MARY AND THE ANGELS OF THE ASSUMPTION.

1. To the hour of faith succeeds the hour of sight. Victory follows trial. Who shall tell with what transports of joy the Angels received into Heaven their gentle and glorious Queen?

2. Let us try to realize the joy of this event, and in congratulating our dear Mother, let us not forget the place which is reserved for us among the celestial spirits. If it is not for us, as it is for Mary, to reign over the Angels, we are nevertheless called to receive from them the welcome prepared for brethren who are destined to share in the same inheritance of happiness.

COLLOQUY.

We shall ask the Angels first, and then Mary, their Queen, to obtain for us the grace to live in a spirit of simple and trustful submission to God, and to be delivered from pride and the slavery of the world.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS

AUGUST 5

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—A Roman nobleman and his wife, who, being without children, had vowed to consecrate their wealth to the Blessed Virgin, were deliberating as to the best use they could make of their patrimony. During the night of August 4 the Blessed Virgin appeared to them, and also to Pope Liberius, and expressed her desire to see erected on Mount Esquiline a basilica, the site of which should be marked by snow falling in the heat of summer.

Such is the legend which is retained in the Roman Breviary. According to this, the erection of the basilica would date from the second half of the fourth century, as Pope Liberius reigned from 352 to 366. But the authenticity of the story is extremely doubtful. Rome, in fact, appears to have possessed a church of *Maria Antiqua* older than the Liberian Basilica, and the latter did not become a church of the Blessed Virgin until after its reconstruction under Sixtus III. According to Father Nilles, the feast dates from 435. It was at first confined to the basilica, but was extended in the fourteenth century to the whole of Rome, and afterwards to other dioceses. St. Pius V. at the end of the seventeenth century made it a feast

of the whole Church, and Clement VIII. raised it to the rank of a greater double.

Sixtus III. gave to the basilica the name of *St. Mary, Mother of God*, doubtless in commemoration of the Council of Ephesus (431), which, sitting in a church dedicated to Mary, had just proclaimed the dogma of the Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin. Besides its name of the *Liberian Basilica*, or *Our Lady of the Snows*, the church is also called *Our Lady of the Crib*, from the sacred relics of the crib of Our Saviour, which were brought thither in the seventh century. But the popular name of this magnificent church is *St. Mary Major*, which reminds us of the rank which it occupies at Rome among the churches dedicated to the Mother of God. It is the most splendid monument which Mary possesses in the Eternal City, and it serves as a second cathedral for the Bishop of Rome.

We celebrate, then, on August 5 the dedication of the principal, if not the most ancient, of the churches erected in Rome in honour of the Blessed Virgin. We are at once reminded of the innumerable temples erected by the piety of the faithful to the august Mother of God. Every Catholic town, however unimportant, has a church of Our Lady. Many of these sanctuaries have pious stories connected with them, true or legendary, of some wonderful statue which has had a church built over it, or of some wish of Mary miraculously expressed. These churches of the Blessed Virgin are generally the most frequented. The faithful by preference go to pray there, and the votive offerings testify to a confidence which is usually justified by the result.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Why this eagerness on the part of the faithful to build and to visit churches dedicated to Mary? It is a question worth asking. Let us endeavour in this meditation to discover the peculiar charm of these churches, and the close connection which seems to exist between these sanctuaries of Mary and Christian piety.

We shall consider the church (1) when it is *planned*, (2) when it is *consecrated*, and (3) when it is *frequented*; and we shall see that the piety of the faithful finds (1) *Jesus through Mary*, (2) *Jesus in Mary*, (3) *Jesus with Mary*.

MEDITATION.

“*Et erat Mater Jesus ibi*”—*And the Mother of Jesus was there* (St. John ii. 1).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. There, at the feet of the statue of Mary, we will make our meditation.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to profit spiritually by the help that is given us by churches dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

I. THE CHURCH PLANNED, OR JESUS THROUGH MARY.

I. 1. The motive of the construction of a church of the Blessed Virgin is evidently the desire to honour and please the Mother of God. It is in honour of Mary that the architect designs the plan. The iron is forged, the stone is dressed, the wood is planed for Mary. For her the bells are cast : in

her honour the faithful contribute their alms. Nevertheless, the temple is essentially destined to become the dwelling-place of Jesus. The chief idea, then, in building a church in the name of the Blessed Virgin is Jesus through Mary, or Mary for Jesus. The little village with its church dedicated to the Mother of God resembles the great world. It finds Jesus through Mary. And this is really the meaning of the Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Like all other lawful devotions, and more than most, it is a means of going to Jesus. No act of sincere piety can derogate from the law formulated by St. Paul : " All are yours ; you are Christ's ; and Christ is God's " (1 Cor. iii. 23).

II. 2. This complete subordination of Mary to Jesus, besides directing our piety, suggests also this useful lesson. Let us imitate Mary in being entirely devoted to Jesus. If we live entirely for Him, let us bring to Him all that concerns us, our crosses and sorrows, to unite them to His sorrows and His merits ; the honour and esteem which we enjoy in order to honour and glorify Him ; the affection which is shown to us in order to make Him loved. Such an act may be called a generous renunciation, a real sacrifice ; but we give up only what is transient to put on Christ, Who alone endures for ever. He takes from us frail and perishable things in order to enrich us with immortal treasures.

II. THE CHURCH CONSECRATED, OR JESUS IN MARY.

1. Mary is, it may be said, the prototype of the Catholic Church. She was a living tabernacle

containing the Saviour, just as our churches enclose Him in the tabernacle above the Altar. The Blessed Sacrament was formerly reserved everywhere, as it is still in the Greek Church, in a vessel in the form of a dove suspended in the sanctuary in front of the Altar. This symbol reminded us that the action of the same Holy Spirit which formerly gave Jesus to Mary now gives Him to our churches. The spotless purity of the Blessed Virgin and the gold of her charity and her virtues symbolize the comeliness and splendour with which we seek to surround our God in the tabernacle.

2. (1) We cannot deny the great pleasure which Our Lord feels to dwell in the hearts which give themselves wholly to Him, nor the vital importance of preaching true faith and morality, but we must not be narrow-minded, or chary of the money which is required for the adornment of churches and sanctuaries. The money spent on this outward decoration is well laid out. Such is the judgment ratified by the venerable tradition of the Catholic Church. As soon as she enjoyed a little respite after a long period of persecution she built new churches, and decorated them with the utmost magnificence, though there were as many souls to be saved then as now. This care for the splendour of worship is so natural a result of love and reverence that it is hard to understand its absence from places where God is truly loved and honoured.

(2) Even more than the churches the heart of the Christian who has received Jesus Christ resembles Mary. It ought, consequently, to reproduce the principal virtues of the heart of Mary—

purity and love. Let us, then, in our Communion make a practice of putting before us Mary as the model for our imitation.

III. THE CHURCH FREQUENTED, OR JESUS WITH MARY.

1. This is the great attraction of churches dedicated to Mary. Jesus is the centre, and the fervent piety of the worshippers imagines Mary as close to Him. Everything there is for Jesus, and everything recalls Mary. She who is pure mercy must ever be associated with Him Who combines mercy and justice, her all-powerful intercession with His essential mediation, the Mother with the Son, the Co-Redemptress with the Redeemer. When we think of these things, we offer our prayers with increased confidence and fervour which cannot fail to bring down upon us more abundant blessings.

2. Let us love to visit in this spirit the churches dedicated to Mary. In all our prayers and devotions let our thoughts associate Jesus and Mary, knowing that we shall thus find greater support for our confidence, and shall have more hope of having our prayers heard by God.

COLLOQUY.

Let us conclude our exercise by offering our devotion to Jesus and Mary. If we feel drawn to do so, let us imitate Blessed Grignon de Montfort in the habit of doing all for Jesus through Mary, all in Mary and as she did it, and all with Mary.

Ave Maria.

FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

AUGUST 15

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Assumption is the Feast, properly so called, of the Blessed Virgin, of her entrance into glory. If we attach no other meaning to it but that of a happy passage to eternal life, such as forms the ordinary subject of the congratulations which we address to the Saints on their feast-days, the solemnity goes back to very ancient times. It is, indeed, most probably the earliest of all the special feasts of Mary, though before its institution Mary received a share of the homage offered by the piety of the Church in the celebration of the mysteries in which she had taken a part. A panegyric of St. Theodosius, pronounced about the year 500 by Theodore, mentions that the monks of Palestine used to celebrate with great pomp every year the memory of the Mother of God. The feast was probably instituted shortly after the Council of Ephesus (431).

The testimony of St. Gregory of Tours proves beyond doubt that Gaul had its Feast of the Blessed Virgin in the sixth century. In the middle of the seventh century the Tenth Council of Toledo decided to put an end to the diversity

of practice in different parts of Spain by assigning to the Feast of Mary one uniform date for all dioceses.

The Feast of the *Dormition* mentioned in the Sacramentary of Pope Gelasius was certainly introduced into Rome in the seventh century, and it may be said that at that time almost the whole of the Church, East and West, celebrated the Feast of the Assumption.

While Rome and the Eastern Church honoured the Blessed Virgin on August 15, Gaul had kept the feast on January 18, and Spain (after the Council of Toledo) on December 18, while the Copts celebrated the death and Assumption of Mary on January 16.

The Western Church and the heterodox Eastern Church agree in celebrating the complete glorification of Mary, body and soul. How long has Christian piety expressly commemorated the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin? It is impossible to say, but St. Gregory of Tours in the sixth century speaks in the most explicit manner of the bodily presence of Mary in Heaven. At the end of the seventh century the Gothic Missal expresses the same belief in the beautiful Collect of the feast. In a document which owes its weight to the great name of St. Jerome very guarded language is used, probably from fear of borrowing anything from writings of doubtful authority; but all hesitation had disappeared by the end of the ninth century, and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was definitely accepted by the whole of the Catholic world.

CELEBRATION OF THE SOLEMNITY—I. *Prepara-*

tory Novena.—The importance of this feast leads the faithful to prepare themselves for it with particular care, and it would be well to make a novena of preparation, which might be usefully devoted to a study of devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the best means of acquiring it. What subject could be more appropriate for the days immediately preceding the Feast of Mary? At the end of the first part of this book will be found a novena for acquiring devotion to Our Lady, but as these exercises may usefully be practised at other times of the year, as occasion offers, they are not inserted here for the Feast of the Assumption.

2. *Meditations.*—Two meditations are given for the feast itself, of which one is directly connected with the object of the solemnity; the other is taken from the Gospel of the feast. In the meditations for Saturdays we have treated of the glory of the body and soul of Mary, and those will serve as a third exercise suitable to this day.

FIRST MEDITATION FOR THE ASSUMPTION.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The exercise will be divided into three parts, recalling the principal ideas suggested by the solemnity—namely: (1) The *happy passage of Mary to a better life*; (2) her *complete glorification in soul and body*; and (3) the *triumphal welcome given her in Heaven*.

“*Surge, Domine, in requiem tuam; tu et arca sanctificationis tuæ*”—*Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting-place; Thou and the ark which Thou hast sanctified* (Ps. cxxxi. 8).

First Prelude.—Let us fix our eyes on Heaven, its

splendour, and its inhabitants, at a moment when great preparations are being made for an extraordinary rejoicing.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask, through the Blessed Virgin, that, while waiting for the happy hour of our meeting with her and her Divine Son, we may lead on earth a life worthy of Heaven.

I. THE HAPPY DEATH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

1. To realize the full meaning of this event, let us follow the pious Abbot Gueric, a devout client of Mary, and an intimate friend of St. Bernard. In his second sermon on the mutual love of Jesus and Mary he asks us to imagine the last day of Our Lady's life on earth. The blessed spirits who love to do her service come down from Heaven to find her stretched on her humble couch ; struck by the pallor of her face, they gently ask her : " How is it, dear Mother, that for days we have not seen you making your usual pilgrimage to those sacred spots which speak to you of your Son, of His Passion and glorious Ascension ?" And Mary answers only : " I languish, I languish with love." " Tell us, then," they continue, " O Virgin full of grace, beloved of the Most Holy Trinity, if you are weak, what medicine will restore your strength ? If you are wounded, what balm will heal your wounds ?" " Jesus is my balm ! He is my medicine ! Jesus seen as He is in His glory, Jesus held, possessed for ever !" And while the Angels fly back to the throne of Jesus, Mary feels an increasing weakness in all her limbs, and gently and painlessly her soul is released from her body. and that miracle which

had lasted for so many years—the miracle of the Mother of God continuing to exist separated from her Son—comes to an end.

2. A soul at peace, undisturbed by the approach of death, is one of the most beautiful sights that faith can offer for our admiration. There have been Saints who have lived so detached from this world that only their zeal for the salvation of souls has kept them here. And how many Christians of all ages and both sexes have found such unspeakable comfort in that dreaded moment that they have cried out in surprise that they would never have thought it was so easy to die! What is the secret of this peace? Let us be careful henceforth that there may be nothing in the approach of death to disturb or terrify us. What is it that can console and reassure us at our last hour?

(1) A lively faith, a child-like trust in God, maintained by devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Sacred Heart.

(2) A love of purity, and a tender conscience in all things.

(3) The memory of a real, loving, and bountiful charity; for the good man who is in conformity with God has promise of the life which is to come.

(4) The memory of some insult or suffering borne patiently for the sake of Christ.

(5) In a word, the participation in one of the Beatitudes of the Gospel.

II. THE GLORY OF SOUL AND BODY.

1. (1) Let us contemplate the soul of the Blessed Virgin, and her graces and virtues. No other

soul can approach the perfect purity of the soul of Mary ; let us draw near to embrace her and be made holy by her touch. As we say to the soul of Jesus, so let us say to that soul made so exactly after His image and likeness : " Soul of Mary, sanctify me."

No creature's soul ever went so straight to God after this life as the soul of the Mother of God. No soul was ever so united to Him, none had ever longed so eagerly for Him. There could not possibly be any question of delay in her attainment of complete happiness, and who can tell all that happiness was ? Everything in her past life now becomes to her a cause of increase of glory. How she blesses Our Lord now for all her past troubles ! To no one else did the words of Holy Scripture ever so well apply : " To them that love God all things work together unto good " (Rom. viii. 28).

(2) Without reaching so high a place, the souls of Saints heroically purified by patience have been admitted without delay to enjoy the vision of God, the object of their faith, their hope, their love : what destiny could be more enviable than this ?

Let us think how long our earthly life can possibly last ; at the most it can only be for a few years, and after that we can be perfectly happy for ever, if we choose. The grace of God shows us this vision of the future, invites us, urges us to make a reality of it, and gives us the means to do so—if we choose ! But if we are really in earnest, we must be determined to bear the troubles and difficulties of this life ; we must have a perfectly directed intention, keep a constant guard over our actions,

and struggle manfully with the obstacles which stand in our way. Are these conditions so very hard to comply with?

2. (1) There are some persons whose bodies seem to weigh down their souls ; the soul of the Blessed Virgin, on the contrary, seemed, as it were, to spiritualize her body. No imperfect happiness could suffice for her who was all-holy, and who had given the substance of her body for the most sacred service. The spouse of the Word must be where the Word Himself was. The Queen of the universe must triumph also over death ; earth cannot keep back her sacred remains ; her body is transfigured and reunited to her soul, and Mary ascends, body and soul, to Heaven.

(2) Happy in the joy of Mary, let us learn from her on this auspicious day that slavery to carnal desires condemns our bodies to death and corruption, but that, on the other hand, the close union with God, into which we are brought by Holy Communion and correspondence with His grace, is the germ of life and immortality. Let us, then, by the practice of purity and frequent Communion, sow in our souls the seeds of eternal life.

III. MARY'S RECEPTION INTO HEAVEN.

1. "Heaven," says Bossuet, "has its solemn feasts and its triumphant rejoicings as well as earth, or, rather, earth usurps the name to give a little lustre to its own empty show ; but the reality can only be found in all its beauty in the solemn feasts of our celestial country, the heavenly Jerusalem." But how shall we picture to ourselves one of the

most majestic of these feasts—the entry of the Mother of God into the glory of Paradise ?

(1) *Her Welcome by God.*—It is the welcome of a Father Who puts His child into possession of a splendid inheritance. “ Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come ” (Cant. ii. 10). These words echo in Mary’s ears ; she recognizes the voice of Jesus, her Son, Who says to her, with fuller meaning than to any other : “ I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat ; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink ; I was a stranger, and you took Me in ; naked, and you covered Me ” (St. Matt. xxv. 35, 36). And Mary will not answer as the other elect answer Him, saying, “ Lord, when did we see Thee hungry and fed Thee ? ” for she will have the sweet memories of Bethlehem and Nazareth. And see how God the Son hastens to raise to Himself her to whom He had gone down from Heaven, to share His glory with her who had given Him her humility ; to bestow immortal life on her from whom He had received His perishable life. The Holy Spirit recognizes the beauty of the living temple in which He has not ceased to dwell, and wishes that all should admire her holiness, her incomparable beauty, her ineffaceable happiness.

(2) *Her Welcome by the Angels and the Saints.*—It is impossible to imagine this reception ; all we know is that the welcome was most cordial, most sincere, and that all the Saints were perfectly united in offering it, for it would not be a feast of Heaven if any thought of envy or discord could find a place there.

2. (1) God and the Saints are preparing for us

in Heaven a welcome similar to that of the Mother of God. With this prospect before us, we have reason for that continual rejoicing of which St. Paul speaks: "Brethren, rejoice, be perfect" (2 Cor. xiii. 11). "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice" (Phil. iv. 4).

(2) Envy mars the feasts of earth, as it would mar the feasts of Heaven if it could enter there. Let us drive away this enemy of our souls, and keep in our hearts only concord and charity.

COLLOQUY.

Let us follow Mary as she is received into Heaven, rejoice with her, thank the Angels and Saints for their welcome, and bless God for the glory given to our Protectress and Queen, while we beg for a place near her, however humble, for ourselves, and those for whom we are accustomed or bound to pray.

Regina cœli, lætare, alleluia.

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

SECOND MEDITATION ON THE GOSPEL OF THE DAY.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The question was asked long ago why the Mass of this day contains a Gospel which has no reference to the life of the Blessed Virgin, whose feast is celebrated, but describes Our Lord's visit to the house of Martha and her sister Mary at Bethany. The explanation is to be found in the practice, which is common in the literature of ascetic theology, of applying the words of Holy Scripture in a metaphorical sense.

The sister of Martha, sitting in contemplation at the feet of Jesus, symbolizes, according to St. Augustine, the eternal vision of a future life. On August 15 the Church celebrates the entrance of the Mother of God into eternal life—the gift of that life in an eminent degree, such as does not fall to the lot of other creatures. She who enjoys this high privilege is called Mary. Is not this enough to make the Gospel narrative of the visit to Bethany appropriate to the day? Though the Blessed Virgin is not directly spoken of, surely she is represented in figure.

Other salutary thoughts are suggested by the sacred text, and we shall divide our meditation thereon into three points: (1) *Martha*, or *the present life*; (2) *the sister of Martha*, or *the future life*; (3) *Mary the Mother of Jesus*, or *the passage from one life to the other*, and *the union of the two lives*.

MEDITATION.

“Maria optimam partem elegit”—*Mary hath chosen the best part* (St. Luke x. 42).

First Prelude.—Let us remember how Our Lord was received in the household of Lazarus; how Martha, one of the sisters of His friend, was busy with much serving, while Mary, the other sister, sat at His feet listening to every word that fell from His lips. Martha complained that her sister left her alone to serve, and Jesus, answering, said to her: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things: but one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine the interior of the house of Bethany.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to follow in the steps of our Blessed Mother, and so to pass through the cares of earth as to merit the repose of eternity.

I. MARTHA, OR THE PRESENT LIFE.

I. "*Sollicita es et turbaris erga plurima*"—"Thou art careful, and art troubled about many things" (St. Luke x. 41). The present life is a continual succession of cares of all kinds; that, indeed, is its characteristic note. Imagine a soul filled with pure and lofty aspirations sincerely desirous, like Martha, of serving Jesus Christ.

(1) That soul has many *personal* reasons for being troubled—her own weakness, her inconstancy, her temptations, regret for the past, fear for her own perseverance in the future.

(2) *In her home life* she has many things which distress her—such, for instance, as the misconduct, the impiety, the spiritual danger of a husband, a child, a parent, or an intimate friend.

(3) *In her relations with society in general* the interest which she takes in God's cause is the source of much anxiety; she yearns to see her dependents good and pious; her superiors zealous, devoted, and unselfish; her equals as fervent in God's service as she is herself; and on all sides she finds herself thwarted and opposed in doing good.

No wonder that this poor soul, so full of holy zeal, now encouraged by hope of success, now pained by bitter disappointments, now depressed

and disheartened by the consciousness of her own weakness, should find many things about which to be careful and troubled !

So much for generous, unselfish souls ; what shall we say of those who mind earthly things, who value only riches, success, human friendships, and the like ? Innumerable and unceasing are the cares which, so to speak, spring up under the feet of these slaves : the false happiness of this world is made up of so many different elements that there is nearly always something wanting in it.

2. Let us accept the cares that are inseparable from the present life as a wholesome and profitable trial ; these are the chances of war—the war that we wage for God. But two resolutions are necessary—first, to be always steadfast and courageous ; and, secondly, never to attempt to free ourselves from those cares by giving up the struggle. To do this would be to give way to selfishness, and show ourselves cowards ; if care is not happiness, at all events it is better than indifference.

II. MARY, THE SISTER OF MARTHA, OR THE FUTURE LIFE.

1. "*Optima pars, quæ non auferetur*"—"The best part, which shall not be taken away !" (St. Luke x. 42). To the anxieties of the present succeeds the calm serenity of the future life. Now we are on the stormy sea ; then we shall be on the peaceful shore. Here all is change ; there is happy rest. Here are the storm and tempest ; there the genial sun and the fresh breeze. Here are contention, rivalry, and discord ; there universal harmony

and goodwill. Here the victory of evil ; there the final triumph of good. Here the misery of the creature ; there its eternal happiness with the Creator.

How joyful will be that life at the feet of Our Saviour, Who is our beginning and our last end ! Our happiness will be enhanced by the gratitude which is called forth by the presence of our Benefactor, for we shall enjoy the perfection of bliss through Jesus Christ, and with Him for ever.

2. What a happy prospect is opened out to us ! While we are still in this changeful life, let us raise our eyes towards the changeless eternity. Let us live, work, suffer, remembering always that we have Heaven in view. The time will soon come for us to take possession of our heavenly inheritance ; the more piously we have hoped for it, the more quickly and more certainly it will arrive.

" How good God is," says the Venerable Bede, " to have placed in this transitory life the struggles and labours, and to have reserved the crowns and rewards of merits for the eternal life ! " Let us help ourselves on our way by thinking of Heaven, as the " Imitation of Christ " advises, reading attentively Book III., chapters xlvi. and xlix.

III. MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS, OR THE PASSAGE FROM ONE LIFE TO THE OTHER, AND THE UNION OF THE TWO LIVES.

I. (I) Martha's cares will be taken away ; Mary's contemplation remains. We pass from the troubles of Martha to the delightful vision of Mary. But what passing is comparable to that of the Blessed Virgin ? From a life which was a true

martyrdom she is transported to the highest pinnacle of eternal glory, having everything below her, save only God and Jesus Christ. Who shall measure the distance which separates the deepest grief from the most exalted happiness? Mary passed from one to the other in an instant: who shall describe her transports of joy, the ocean of happiness into which she is plunged?

(2) On the other hand, it is true that this passage to a happy life was but the completion, the consummation of what she had already begun to taste. The cares which crossed the existence of Mary could not disturb the serene calm of her soul fixed firmly in God; her faith, her hope, her charity brought her true consolation, even in the midst of her trials.

2. In like manner we may model our lives after the example of our Blessed Mother, and so join the merit of suffering with the foretaste of eternity.

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask of Mary, and of Jesus through Mary, the grace to accept with courage the present struggle, and to keep in our hearts a place into which the cares of life cannot enter, because, known by faith, hoped for and loved, God reigns there alone.

Ave Maris Stella.

FEAST OF THE MOST PURE HEART OF MARY

*SUNDAY AFTER THE OCTAVE OF THE ASSUMPTION
OR THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST*

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The first public demonstration in honour of the most pure Heart of Mary took place at the close of a mission given in the Cathedral of Autun on February 8, 1648. The initiative was taken by the Rev. Father Eudes Mézerai, founder of the Society of Jesus and Mary, commonly known as the Eudists, and by permission of the Papal legate, Cardinal de Vendôme, a Feast of the Heart of Mary was celebrated for the first time in the Congregation on February 8, 1668. Father Eudes himself drew up the Office, which is full of impressive eloquence. The Friars Minor of France and Father Gallifet, S.J., exerted themselves to procure the official recognition of the Feast of the Heart of Mary. The first formal Pontifical approbation came from Pope Pius VII., who granted to the Clerks Regular of the Mother of God a feast which was thenceforth celebrated almost everywhere. It is kept on various dates, generally either on the third Sunday after Pentecost, or on the Sunday after the Octave of the Assumption. The proper

Mass and Office, as distinguished from the Mass and Office in use amongst the Eudists, were approved on July 21, 1855.

The Church of Our Lady of Victories at Paris owes its renown to the favours of the Heart of Mary. On December 16, 1836, the Rector, the Abbé des Genettes, founded, under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Arch-Confraternity for the Conversion of Sinners, which numbers more than 20,000 affiliated confraternities and millions of members. Pius IX. recognized in the institution of this confraternity the effect of the inspiration of God.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The Church consecrates a day to celebrate the purity of the Heart of Mary, and the Gospel chosen for the feast recalls the praise bestowed on the Blessed Virgin: "His Mother kept all these words in her heart." The most remarkable of the words here alluded to was the mysterious answer given by Jesus to His Mother when He was found in the Temple: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" In the collect, we thank God that by the purity of the Heart of Mary He has prepared a worthy habitation for the Holy Spirit.

The meditation consists of three parts: (1) Purity of heart; (2) the means of acquiring it; (3) the happy effects of this purity.

MEDITATION.

"*Mater ejus conservabat omnia verba hæc in corde suo*"—*His mother kept all these words in her heart* (St. Luke ii. 51):

First Prelude.—Let us unite ourselves in spirit with that company of virgins who follow the spotless Lamb whithersoever He goeth (Apoc. xiv. 4), and let us gaze on her who is beside Him—her whose heart was never sullied by any breath of impurity.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask of the most pure Heart of Mary the grace to understand more and more the beauty, the nobility, the heavenly charm of a virgin soul, in order that we may cleanse our hearts from every stain.

I. PURITY OF HEART.

1. (1) Purity of heart is purity of the affections, and this consists in a chastity of soul which keeps us free from all unlawful affections. Our imagination enables us to form mental representations of material objects, and we can with equal distinctness construct images of objects of the most ignoble as of the most beautiful kind. God and the Saints look upon the basest actions, but without contracting the slightest stain from them. To the pure all things are pure ; the heart leaves the objects which it loves just as they are ; and to love them, to be drawn towards them, is to become one with them. Do we understand that our affections are the measure of our moral worth—that, in allowing ourselves to be drawn towards unworthy objects, we descend, we degrade ourselves, but that while our heart is lifted up, we also are lifted up to the love of high and beautiful things ? To love vileness and filth is to be vile and filthy ourselves ; to love God is to raise ourselves as nearly as possible to the likeness of God.

(2) But are our hearts free to choose as they

please? We are solemnly bound to God, Who, as we are assured in Holy Scripture, loves us with a jealous love, and will not tolerate any rivalry in our affections. All unworthy affection is not only a degradation, but more or less a profanation; or, to put it in another way, it is according to its degree the consummation or the beginning of an adultery.

(3) What does perfect purity mean? To purity of the object loved we must unite perfect purity of intentions, with proper regulation of the affection bestowed. To be perfectly pure is not to be wanting in affection, but to love what is worthy of our love loyally, and neither too much nor too little.

2. (1) It is very difficult for us to be perfectly pure, to fulfil all the three conditions—for us who have not our affections fully under control. And what a laborious task is the purification of the soul! Even bad objects have a power of fascination; and how easy it is, when bestowing our affection on a good object, to go beyond its goodness and seek for some other quality in it!

(2) This threefold perfection of the affections in Mary constitutes the wonderful purity of her heart, to which, in unison with the Catholic Church, we shall delight to offer our respectful tribute of admiring love.

II. THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING THIS PURITY.

1. (1) The Church points out the way which leads to purity by adopting the words of the Gospel in order to praise Mary for having kept

the words of God in her heart. Does she not in this matter follow the teaching of Our Lord Himself? After the Last Supper Jesus said to His Apostles: "Now are you clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you" (St. John xv. 3). "My teachings, My warnings, My counsels have detached your minds from worldly goods, from false pleasures, from pride. They have cleared away the darkness of your minds, and instilled into your hearts the virtues of true faith, hope, and charity. The measure of your willingness to follow My teaching is the measure of the purity to which you have attained."

(2) But to produce these effects the Word of God must be received and kept in the heart. The heart is the fertile soil in which the seed of the Word springs up and bears fruit abundantly.

Alas! how many men there are into whose ears the sound of the Word of God scarcely enters before other sounds drown it, as the feet of the passers-by trample the seed which falls by the wayside.

2. What is the best means of receiving the Word so that we may derive the greatest benefit from it? To meditate upon it. By reflection, by serious meditation, we absorb the Divine Word into our hearts. We are penetrated by its truth, and disposed to the practice of it. The Word of God is the seed of purity. The practice of its precepts enables us to gather this precious fruit.

III. THE HAPPY EFFECTS OF PERFECT PURITY.

Perfect purity makes of our hearts a habitation in which the Holy Spirit loves to dwell—"the

temple of the Holy Ghost, bought with a great price, the price of the blood of Jesus Christ, and loved by Him with a jealous love" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; St. James iv. 5). When we read words like these in the Holy Scriptures, we may say that our poor hearts, if once they are really pure, seem to have some mysterious attraction for God Himself. "My delights," says the Eternal Wisdom, "were to be with the children of men" (Prov. viii. 31). The man who is deceived by the seductive voice of passion may think little of the punishment which awaits him in the distant future, and which he may hope in some way to escape, but does he think of what he must necessarily lose at once? Honour, good name, the happiness of a spouse of the Most High—all this is what the pure soul enjoys, but the soul which is stained by impurity must relinquish. This is what brings peace and transfiguration to the pure soul, and makes it shine with a supernatural beauty and charm.

COLLOQUY.

Happy should we be if the meditation of this feast gave us a greater love of innocence and purity. Let us ask this through Mary as a gift of her most pure heart.

Vitam præsta puram.

Make our life all spotless.

FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LADY

SEPTEMBER 8

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Church, as a rule, does not celebrate the day on which the Saints come into the world still stained by original sin, and subject to all the misfortunes which it entails. She reserves her rejoicing not for the beginning of a trial, the issue of which is still doubtful, but for the end which is its glorious crown. An exception is made in the case of St. John Baptist, who was sanctified in his mother's womb. Another exception is made with still stronger reason in the case of her whose birth, like the dawning of the day, heralded the coming of the Divine Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ. From the seventh century at the latest we find the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady celebrated in the East as well as the West, but the universal observance of the feast does not go back further than the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century. From that time this happy day has been regarded as one of the principal feasts of Mary. In the thirteenth century the feast was enriched with an Octave which the Cardinals who were assembled in conclave to elect a successor to Gregory IX. had promised to establish if they overcame the diffi-

culties and divisions created by the intrigues of the Emperor Frederic II. and the discontent of the people. Pope Celestine IV., who was elected at that conclave, reigned only eighteen days, and the vow did not receive its fulfilment until the middle of the thirteenth century, under his successor, Innocent IV.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The Nativity gives Mary to earth, the Assumption gives her to Heaven. With what joy Mary was welcomed by the Angels and the Saints! “*De cuius assumptione gaudent Angeli*”—“At whose Assumption the Angels rejoice” (Introit for the Mass of the Assumption). And should not men greet with similar joy the coming of Mary to earth? “*Nativitas tua gaudium annuntiavit universo mundo*”—“Thy birth has announced joy to the whole world” (Office of the Nativity). We shall consider the mystery from this point of view, and divide the meditation into three parts: (1) *The Nativity of Mary is a source of joy to the world*; (2) *the world knows nothing of its happiness*; (3) *that happiness may become ours in a spiritual manner*.

MEDITATION.

“*Multi in nativitate ejus gaudebunt*”—Many shall rejoice in His Nativity (words spoken by the Angel before the birth of St. John Baptist; St. Luke i. 14).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the modest home of St. Joachim and St. Anne, and the little cot on which she lies who is to be the Mother of God. With what joy the holy parents look down upon

this fruit of blessing which the Lord has given them !

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask the grace to rejoice with holy joy at the birth of Mary, Mother of God and our Mother.

I. THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN A SOURCE OF JOY.

I. (1) Our misery and the pain of childbirth do not prevent us from calling that day happy on which a man is brought into the world. Yet could this be an unmixed joy to a thoughtful mind ?

Does not this frail being run the risk of being carried off by the first breath of the north wind, and so causing a sorrow at its departure greater than the joy of its coming ?

And where is this existence to lead to ? It is the existence of a traveller who may lose his way or may fall over a terrible precipice. The child may be a source of disaster to himself, and may bring similar trouble to others. Though so tenderly welcomed by his father and mother, he may cause the greatest grief of their lives. His baleful influence may spread afar, bringing ruin to bodies and souls, to families, to cities, to whole countries.

We see how the uncertainties of human life are always a source of anxiety. They are especially so because of that stain which we carry with us from our birth, the stain of original sin.

(2) What a joyful day must that have been on which the daughter of Joachim and Anne was born ! Instead of being stained by original sin,

that child shone with the purest lustre of grace. While still in her cradle she surpasses the Angels in her supernatural beauty. Being destined to become the Mother of God, she is protected even from temporal misfortunes, and special Providence will raise her from the fullness of grace to the fullness of glory.

For the rest of mankind, for the whole world, the birth of the Blessed Virgin is the prelude to the birth of that only true joy of the world, the Saviour Who comes to destroy sin, the source of all our evils. Mary not only is the dawn that proclaims the coming of the day, but by her power and her charity she will help to bring men to profit by the light.

(3) Without fully knowing what was to be the future of the Blessed Virgin, her pious parents must have felt an unspeakable joy at the birth of this fondly-loved daughter, their only child, the fruit of such long and fervent prayers, whose external charm reflected the graces within her. Surely their happiness must have been greater than that felt at the birth of an ordinary child, for God added some interior pleasure without revealing its mysterious cause.

2. (1) Let us congratulate St. Joachim and St. Anne on the birth of Mary ; let us in spirit share their happiness—nay, more, let us with Holy Church rejoice for the whole world. O Blessed Virgin, thy birth has filled the whole world with gladness !

(2) Let us realize once more on this happy occasion how everything which takes away sin removes a cause of misery and sorrow,

II. THE JOY UNKNOWN TO THE WORLD.

1. The holy parents of the Blessed Virgin knew only imperfectly the reasons of their joy ; the world was wholly ignorant of its own happiness. While the world celebrated by boisterous rejoicings, and too often by cruel sports, the birth of princes and great personages, the birth of the Queen of all the earth was allowed to pass unnoticed.

2. Poor world, deceived and deceiving ! Why do we pay so much regard to its judgments, which are often unsound ? So much depends on personal popularity, or on unforeseen circumstances, that often the same fact, the same action, may be at one time made the subject of extravagant praise, and at another time passed by without remark. Our pride is hurt by these little slights, these little disappointments. Let us have sufficient independence, sufficient strength of character, not to strive after the good opinion of the world, nor to be distressed if we fail to obtain it.

III. OUR SHARE IN THIS JOY.

1. The world, to its loss, was ignorant of the birth of the Blessed Virgin. Let us not forget that Mary is, as it were, born spiritually in the hearts which are filled with her power and her goodness by a steadfast and tender affection, and let us realize how this spiritual birth comes to fill us with joy.

Happy indeed is this birth by the sentiment with which it fills us : it gladdens our hearts, and brings to us consolation and holy joy and great confidence ; happy, again, by the fruits which it pro-

duces in us—fruits of conversion and holiness. Mary announces Jesus Christ, and brings Him to us.

2. Let us be careful to cherish a filial devotion towards the Blessed Virgin ; let this be a solid devotion, resting on its true foundation, which should be ever present to our minds ; let it be a real devotion, kept alive by regular observance.

Thus we shall be able in happier days than those of earth to repeat what already we say joyfully here below : “ Thy nativity, O Blessed Virgin, has brought happiness to the whole world.”

COLLOQUY.

Let us earnestly ask Our Lord to give us the grace of a tender devotion to His Blessed Mother.

Ave Maria.

FEAST OF THE HOLY NAME OF MARY

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—In the year 1513 permission was given by a Papal indult for the celebration of a feast in honour of the name of Mary in the Diocese of Cuença, in Spain ; it was gradually adopted by other countries, and became universal after the glorious victory of September 12, 1683, on which day Sobieski crowned his campaign, which had been placed under the protection of the Mother of God, by rescuing Vienna from the hands of the Mohammedans. The Christian army moved forward on August 15, with the banner of the Blessed Virgin borne before it. On September 8, the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, the Polish hero fortified himself for the struggle by Holy Communion, and four days later inflicted on the Turks the decisive defeat which put an end to the sufferings of the besieged capital. Innocent XI. resolved to do honour to her to whose intercession the victory was due ; the Christians had conquered in the name of Mary, and on November 25 the Pope published a Decree that the whole Church should honour the name which symbolized the power of Mary, and which had for centuries been held in veneration by Christendom—witness the

Fathers, who applied themselves to bring out the hidden virtue and meaning of the name.

In Spain the feast was at first celebrated on September 22, a fortnight after the Feast of the Nativity, because among the Jews daughters received their names on the fourteenth day after birth.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall consider (1) the *holiness* of the name of Mary; (2) the *meaning* of this holy name; and (3) its *virtue*.

MEDITATION.

“*Et nomen Virginis Maria*”—*And the Virgin's name was Mary* (St. Luke i. 27).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine ourselves part of a valiant army, marching against the enemy, and looking up to the glorious banner on which is inscribed the name of Mary.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to understand this holy name better, in order that we may fight with confidence under this banner of victory.

I. THE HOLINESS OF THE NAME OF MARY.

I. (1) The name is the sign which best brings to our minds the owner of the name. When we hear a person's name mentioned, we immediately think of the owner, his appearance, his nature, all his characteristics. If a person is mentioned who has finished his earthly career, his name does not represent him only at one moment of his existence; it recalls and summarizes all his history:

hence the different impressions which are produced by the mention of persons whom we have known, respected, feared, admired, or loved. The name of a conqueror strikes terror into the minds of the people vanquished ; the name of a cruel tyrant recalls the horror with which he was regarded ; soldiers are inspired with courage by the mention of a great General ; the name of a benefactor or a mother will soothe a wounded heart, assuage anger, and bring back feelings of gentleness, goodness, confidence, and piety.

(2) What is required before we call a name holy ? Not merely the possession of a certain degree of holiness at some particular time ; the holiness of a name demands holiness complete and continual, without spot or stain.

Thrice holy is the Name of God ; the holiness of the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity is essential and eternal in its nature. But what man can claim to have a holy name ? Jesus alone, and, by the grace of Jesus, His Mother Mary. We honour a great multitude of Saints ; but two names only, after that of God, receive the attribute of holiness—the Names of Jesus and Mary. In the Divine praises which are recited at the end of Benediction, the Church blesses the holy Name of God, and adds : “ Blessed be the Name of Jesus ! Blessed be the Name of Mary, Virgin and Mother ! ” but she does not say that of any other name.

2. Let us endeavour to increase our reverence for the Blessed Virgin ; let us rejoice at being able to give her special honour by invoking her sweet and holy name.

II. THE MEANING OF THE NAME OF MARY.

1. (1) God can only give a name which shall anticipate the career, the nature, the life of the person who bears it ; thus the Name of Jesus was not arbitrarily bestowed on the Infant God ; this Name, which literally means Saviour, was given to Him as the Redeemer of the human race. Nothing of this kind seems to have been done for the Blessed Virgin ; we will not stop, then, to ask what is the etymological meaning of the Hebrew name of Mary.

(2) But what does the name mean as applied to the Blessed Virgin ? What kind of an image does it call up when we hear it ? In other words, what is Mary herself ? How shall we describe her ?

We should shrink from the difficulty of this task if the Church did not supply us with an answer, founded on the Divine revelation itself. "Blessed," she cries, "is the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother !" Mary, then, is the Virgin-Mother. Isaias, in his famous prophecy, spoke in the same sense when he said : "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son." And at the Annunciation, when Mary announced her virginity in the words, "How shall this be done when I know not man ?" the Archangel completed the description : "The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee : thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son." From the earliest ages Christian art has represented Mary as a pure virgin with a child in her arms. Mary is the Virgin-Mother.

Mother of Whom ? Of God, first of all ; but of a God Whom she brings forth as Our Saviour, Our Redeemer, as head of the mystical body of which

we all are members, and therefore she is also Mother of men. "Mother of God, and our Mother," cried St. Stanislas with eloquent simplicity.

Mary, then, in her incomparable dignity, possesses three attributes: as Virgin, she has the beauty of the Angels; as Mother of God, she approaches Him as closely as a creature can possibly do; as Mother of men, she remains ours, she is bound to us by the closest of ties. She unites in herself the most perfect purity, the most exalted majesty, and the tenderest goodness; and these three qualities are most harmoniously blended in her person. Her purity has prepared her to be the Mother of God, and her Divine maternity has made her also Mother of men; her grace is full of majesty, and her dignity is full of sweetness.

2. (1) We must not only wonder and admire, but endeavour to profit by the lesson that Mary gives us.

(2) In order that there may be room in us for God and the works of His grace, we must have a purity as perfect as possible. And do we wish truly to love our neighbour? If so, we must first love God.

(3) Why is Mary's love for us so intense and so holy? Because it rests on her Divine maternity. Similarly, if we wish to exercise an apostolate which shall be fruitful of good results, we must remember that this can only come from a close union with God. How foolish are those men who neglect their duty to God that they may be better able to fulfil their duty to their neighbour!

III. THE VIRTUE OF THE HOLY NAME OF MARY.

We may consider this virtue in regard to God, to ourselves, and to our enemy, the Devil.

1. In relation to God, Mary, being the Mother of Christ and our Mother, has her power of intercession, with the right of interposing in all human affairs.

2. In relation to us, the Mother of God is entitled to our deepest veneration. The Mother of men should inspire us with unbounded confidence. The two dignities united in one person demand our eternal devotion.

3. As to Satan, the purity of Mary reminds him of his complete defeat in the past; the dignity of the Mother of God reveals to him a power against which it is vain for him to fight; the quality of the Mother of men shows him a willingness to succour which compels him to fly from the Christian who invokes the name of Mary. Consequently, at the name of Mary Hell trembles, Heaven rejoices, and humanity recovers its hope.

COLLOQUY.

Let us fervently use the prayer which the Church on this day puts into the mouth of her priests: "Grant, we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that Thy faithful who rejoice under the name and protection of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, may by her pious intercession be delivered from all evils here on earth, and be brought to the eternal joys of Heaven."

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

SEPTEMBER 24

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—At the beginning of the thirteenth century the Saracens were in possession of a considerable part of Spain, and detained great numbers of Christians in a miserable state of slavery. St. Peter Nolasco, distinguished already for his piety, his compassion to the poor, and his many works of charity of all kinds, conceived the idea of helping these unhappy captives in some more effectual manner than by the numerous confraternities which had already been established for that purpose. He hesitated for some time before deciding what kind of life would be most pleasing to Our Lord, when on August 2, 1218, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him in a vision, charging him to found a religious order devoted expressly to the noble work of the redemption of captives. Peter Nolasco obeyed, and with the help of James I., King of Aragon, and the learned Canonist, St. Raymond of Pennafort, established the *Order of Our Lady of Mercy*, which by reason of the vision above mentioned can boast of having the Blessed Virgin as its principal foundress.

The first grant of an Office of Our Lady of

Mercy was made on April 4, 1615, and the festival, which was at first confined to the order, was extended in 1680 to Spain, in 1690 to France, and became a festival of the Universal Church in 1696 by Decree of Pope Innocent XII. The name of the festival brings to our minds the great religious order, and at the same time the compassion of the Blessed Virgin.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The dispositions that we must try to develop in our minds by this meditation are a humble gratitude towards God, a better appreciation of the continual protection of the Blessed Virgin, and an ardent zeal for the good of our fellow-men. We shall therefore consider (1) *our lot in life* ; (2) *the continual protection of the Blessed Virgin* ; and (3) *the zeal which we ought to display for the salvation of souls*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Videns civitatem, flevit super illam* ”—*Seeing the city, He wept over it* (St. Luke xix. 41).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine those barbarous countries in which men, our brethren, are still kept in miserable slavery.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to appreciate better the favours bestowed upon us, and the misery of others, in order to increase our confidence and our zeal.

I. OUR LOT COMPARED WITH THAT OF OTHER MEN.

1. The contemplation of the misery and suffering, moral and physical, which have been brought upon the whole human race by the first sin of Adam is

an extremely sad one. Let us read the history of the world before the Christian era. What terrible barbarity we see in the country we inhabit ! In Rome thousands of human beings groaned under the yoke of slavery, and at one time the lives and even the virtue of these slaves were at the mercy of their cruel and profligate masters. In our own day all Europe has been shocked to hear from the intrepid explorers of Africa that the route of the caravans is strewn with human bones, no doubt those of slaves who have been collected among the savage tribes, and dragged to a public market, and who have fallen exhausted on the way. Think of the tortures inflicted on other men in China and Turkey, and think that all these men are our brothers !

2. (1) We may well rejoice over the salutary influence of Christianity, which has delivered us from the dangers of such evils. Ought not this to excite in us a great love for our religion, and a great zeal to defend it, and to spread it through the world ?

(2) But, above all, let us compare our lot, temporal and spiritual, with that of those miserable slaves. Whatever be the terrible sufferings of these, we know that a merciful God watches over the salvation of all, and what is necessary is refused to no one. We do not recognize in anyone else the right to murmur and complain, and yet we claim this right for ourselves—we who form a people chosen to a higher lot, to greater privileges than the natural descendants of Abraham. Our condition differs more from that of nations who are not Christian than ever Israel did from the

Amalekites and the Philistines. Oh, when Catholics, priests, religious moan and lament over some trifling annoyance, and show themselves careless of all but merely selfish human interests, how they must displease God, and how many precious blessings they must lose in consequence ! “Look at your fellow-men,” God may say to us, as He sees the whole spectacle of humanity displayed before His eyes, “and tell Me if you have any right to complain.” Look back on your own past lives. Have I not freely lavished My favours upon you, or have your own actions given you any claim to be loaded with blessings ?

The thought of the multitude of God’s undeserved blessings should fill us with confusion. Let us bear cheerfully the little trials and sufferings of this life ; let our hearts be filled with humble contentment and submission.

II. THE CONTINUAL PROTECTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

1. The circumstances attending the foundation of the Order of Mercy show us Our Blessed Lady full of tender solicitude for her unhappy children, and implanting in the hearts of men a generous impulse to help them. This is an instance of what she herself is continually doing for us. Mary is constantly mediating in our behalf, but her intervention is generally lost sight of, and we ascribe any good-fortune that comes to us merely to its natural cause, which has operated only in furtherance of the designs of our loving Mother.

2. (1) Let us remark in this connection that the

gifts of God do not lose in value by passing through other men's hands. When God makes some inanimate thing act for us, as when He made the water support Peter walking upon it, we cry aloud at the miracle. Is He less kind when He employs a rational creature, and invites him to share in the honour of doing good? Look at the same thing from another point of view. Men who do good to us only obey a Divine inspiration. They have received from God even the power and the means to help us. And as these pass by and disappear, it is owing to God's good Providence that other kind hearts succeed them, rejoicing at the opportunity of doing us a favour or rendering us some service. The succession of benefits received is all the work of God alone.

(2) At the same time, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin continually goes on. Let us acknowledge our indebtedness to her for all the occasions on which good has been done to us; and let this feeling make us constant in our appeals to this great helper.

III. ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS.

1. The patronage which Mary granted to the excellent work of the redemption of captives shows us that this Mother of men is pleased to see us displaying brotherly charity towards one another.

2. How many unhappy men in our own time are in spiritual captivity, a thousand times heavier and harder to bear than the heaviest chains which weigh down the bodies of slaves! We cannot better show our devotion to Mary than by doing

all in our power for the deliverance of these captives, and by redoubling our zeal for love of the Queen of Heaven. Let us, then, offer this homage which is so dear to her maternal heart.

COLLOQUY.

Let us conclude our meditation with a fervent thanksgiving, with an expression of our confidence in Mary, and with resolutions of generosity in her service.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF SEVEN DOLOURS

SECOND FEAST, THIRD SUNDAY IN SEPTEMBER

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—Pius VII., by his Decree of September 18, 1814, extended to the whole Church a second Feast of Our Lady of Seven Dolours, which had been granted to the Servite Order in 1688. This second celebration is due to the idea that the Church, at the end of Lent, is too much occupied with the mystery of the Redemption to be able to give more than a rapid and cursory glance at the sorrows of Mary.

In this second feast the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin are presented to us as the sole object of our contemplation, and we are at liberty to consider all the trials of her life of martyrdom, the source of so much joy and so many blessings to ourselves. The object of the two feasts is the same : all the sufferings of Mary come from her desire to share in the sufferings of Jesus.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall have the opportunity of contemplating the whole of Mary's sufferings, and so we shall fix our thoughts on the duties which we owe to our sorrowful Mother ; and the three points of our meditation will be the claims which she has to (1) *our compassion* ; (2) *our confidence* ; (3) *our homage and imitation*,

MEDITATION.

"Gemitus matris tuæ ne obliviscaris"—*Forget not the groanings of thy mother* (Ecclus. vii. 29).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the seven incidents in the life of our holy Mother which we are accustomed to look upon as the most painful to her compassionate heart: the prophecy of Simeon, the flight into Egypt, the loss of Jesus in the Temple, the meeting with Jesus on the way to Calvary, the Crucifixion, the taking down from the cross, the burial of Jesus.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to understand our duty towards Mary in her affliction, and to fulfil it with a perfect generosity.

I. THE DUTY OF COMPASSION.

I. Let us begin by directing our attention to the Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin, not in a hasty or perfunctory manner, but so as to bring each scene before us, that we may feel how sharp was the pang which each inflicted on the heart of Mary.

The Prophecy of Simeon.—Nothing is more painful than the certain expectation of misfortune. Henceforth the whole life of the Blessed Virgin is to pass darkened by the prospect which every day, happy or unhappy, brings nearer to fulfilment. If the day is happy, she thinks of the contrast with the future; if unhappy, it seems a fitting prelude of the awful calamity to come.

The Flight into Egypt.—The privations and dangers undergone by a son are those of his mother.

The Loss of Jesus.—Think of Mary's hours of regret, of apprehension, of anxious searching.

The Meeting with Jesus.—Oh, the agony of that loving Mother, unable to do anything to help her Son! Their eyes meet, and the heart of each is pierced by the sight. In what condition does Mary find her Son! In what company! What sorrow Jesus sees depicted on the face of His Mother!

At the Foot of the Cross.—Mary suffers the agony of death with Jesus.

The Taking down from the Cross.—All is over. This is the last crushing blow. The sight of the lifeless body brings back to Mary all the goodness of Jesus, and all the sufferings which that goodness has brought upon Him.

The Burial.—Mary is utterly forlorn, in solitude, without consolation.

2. Having meditated affectionately on the sorrows of Mary, let us reflect on the sacred duty that we owe her, of taking our share in her grief. As children of Mary, we must make her cause our own; we have been redeemed by that agony which Mary has shared; as sinners, we are responsible for the sufferings of Jesus and His Mother.

We may imagine her saying with Noemi after the loss of her husband and children: "Call me not Noemi [that is, beautiful], but call me Mara [that is, bitter], for the Almighty hath quite filled me with bitterness" (Ruth i. 20). And we will answer with affectionate sympathy: "To what shall I compare thee? or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion?" (Lam. ii. 13).

II. THE DUTY OF CONFIDENCE.

1. Mary, by her sorrows, has dearly bought the right to ask for our complete and never-failing confidence, for by the endurance of these sorrows she has gained the power, as she had the will, to help us.

(1) Her power of intercession is increased. By suffering she has gained an immense store of merit, and she can henceforth remind her Son of all she has suffered on His account. What son could resist such pleading?

(2) Her kindness towards us also is increased. She is witness of the agony of her Son, and we cannot imagine that the sight of the passion of Christ would have less effect on her heart than it has had on the hearts of the Saints, which have been set on fire with love of souls. Again, Mary acquiesced in the death of her Son; she was willing to suffer with Him for us. The *fiat* of Nazareth has been ratified on Calvary, and, in consenting to pay this price for the regeneration of men, Mary has once more earned the right to be called their Mother.

The prayer of Mary is henceforth that of a co-redemptress, accepted by God, the object of the veneration of men, and overflowing with maternal love for her children.

2. (1) Let us thank God for having turned all these sufferings to our profit.

(2) And let us show an unfailing confidence in Mary. Either we must deny the truth, or we can safely count on the help of the blessed Mother of God.

III. GENERAL DUTY OF HONOUR AND IMITATION.

1. This Mother, who has suffered so much for our sake, has an incontestable right—

(1) To a tender reverence in all that we do for her.

(2) To the remembrance of her sorrows. We can keep alive this remembrance by the Way of the Cross, by the ordinary Rosary, or the Rosary of the Seven Dolours.

(3) To a grateful and filial affection.

(4) To zeal for her honour.

Let us examine ourselves as to our conduct in the past, and make good resolutions for the future.

2. Mary gives us more admirable lessons, which it is our duty to follow.

(1) Her sufferings are ennobled by their object ; they are all united to those of Christ, and endured for His sake. Zeal in good works brings sorrow, sadness, and disappointment. Let us never forget that there is no more noble suffering than this, and that a sublime vocation does not bring smaller trials, but greater.

(2) In all her sorrow, Mary was not cast down ; calm and full of faith, she pardons the guilty, and acquiesces in the Will of God.

When we suffer, let us remember this exceeding charity of Mary.

COLLOQUY.

Let us pour out our love and gratitude to Mary, and beg her to enable us to profit by the sufferings of her Son for our own salvation and the salvation of others.

Stabat Mater. Ave Maria

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

FIRST SUNDAY IN OCTOBER

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The Feast of the Holy Rosary was instituted in thanksgiving for the famous naval victory obtained over the Turks at Lepanto on Sunday, October 7, 1571, the very day when the processions of the confraternities of the Holy Rosary were taking place. St. Pius V. first ordered that the happy event should be commemorated on October 7, under the title of the *Commemoration of Our Lady of Victory*; but Gregory XIII., by Decree of April 1, 1573, substituted for it the Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, which was to be celebrated on the first Sunday in October. After a new victory of the Christians over the Turks, gained on August 5, 1716, near Peterwaradin, in Hungary, and the deliverance of the island of Corcyra, Clement XI. extended the feast to the whole Church. Leo XIII. added to the Litany of Loretto the invocation, "Queen of the Most Holy Rosary" (by his brief *Salutaris ille* of December 24, 1883), and in 1887 raised the feast to the rank of a double of the second class. The daily public recitation of the Rosary during the month of October is due to this Pontiff, whose conspicuous devotion to the holy

Rosary has been displayed in a series of encyclicals and pontifical letters.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall endeavour by this meditation to increase our love for a devotion which is so highly honoured in the Church, and to understand better how we should recite the Rosary. To this end we shall consider (1) the *power* of the holy Rosary; (2) the *consolation* which we obtain by devoutly reciting it; and (3) the *spirit* which should animate us during its recitation.

MEDITATION.

“ Per te ad nihilum redegit inimicos nostros ”—*By Thee He hath brought our enemies to nought* (Judith xiii. 22).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the circumstances which led to the institution of the Feast of the Holy Rosary.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the Blessed Virgin as she appeared at Lourdes, holding the Rosary in her hand, and seeming to encourage us to recite it.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask the Blessed Virgin to teach us how to use this spiritual weapon to the best advantage.

I. THE POWER OF THE HOLY ROSARY.

I. We must remember that all our supernatural power is derived, in the present order, from the merits acquired by Our Saviour during His mortal life, and we may believe that the intercession of the Blessed Virgin obtains for us the applica-

tion of those merits. Let us consider now the devotion of the holy Rosary. To a continual invocation of the Mother of God we join a meditation on the mysteries of our salvation, and we formally beg for the application of the merits of Jesus Christ through the Blessed Virgin ; we set in motion, as far as possible, all the mediation of justice with all the mediation of grace. We offer to God the realization of the picture He has put before us from the time of Adam's fall—the woman with and through her Son crushing the head of the infernal serpent. Nothing can be better adapted to dispose us for the reception of the Divine favours.

2. Having thoroughly realized this truth, let us endeavour to draw a practical conclusion from it for the recitation of our Rosary. Let us offer to God the merits of Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, and for this purpose let us fix our attention first on the several mysteries, and then on the words addressed to Mary.

II. THE CONSOLATIONS WHICH THE RECITATION OF THE ROSARY OBTAINS FOR US.

I. "*Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.*" Pray for us, thou whose prayers are always heard, who more than any other hast shared in the sufferings of thy Divine Son ; and while we offer to God the merits of that Son, Who has made us His brethren by adoption, do thou help and support us. *Now*—that is to say, in all our present necessities—and *at the hour of our death*—at that moment which decides our fate for all eternity. That is the petition which we address

to the holy Mother of God fifty times over, every time we say the Rosary.

What is more consoling in times of distress and need than the knowledge that we have a powerful helper? What is sweeter at the supreme moment than the certainty that we have one to assist us who is always successful? The daily Rosary is the best means to insure us this strength and this assistance.

2. But to give us this assurance the Rosary must be recited with faith and devotion. Oh, if our faith were strong enough to convince us of the efficacy of this prayer, we should understand why it was the favourite devotion of St. Francis of Sales and St. Alphonsus Liguori; we should be among those who would not omit saying it for anything in the world, and our fidelity would fill us with strength in all our dangers and difficulties. At the hour of death, unless disease has extinguished intellectual and moral life in us, the memory of the Rosaries said *with fervour* will rise up spontaneously to comfort us. Why should we not dwell on this consoling thought during our life? Our confidence here below is the measure of all the favours from on high.

III. IN WHAT SPIRIT WE SHOULD SAY THE ROSARY.

1. We should say the Rosary as valiant soldiers wielding a weapon of victory. We have to fight the good fight daily, and the history of the holy Rosary shows us that it is an invincible weapon.

2. We should say it as Christians who are interested in the welfare of the whole army of Christ.

Let us reflect on these words of Leo XIII. in the Office of the Feast : " Let us not cease to offer to the most holy Mother of God the homage that she loves, in order that, after having gained for the faithful so many decisive victories over their earthly foes, her invocation through the holy Rosary may enable them equally to triumph over their infernal enemies." These solemn words show us the mind of the holy Father. We are now engaged in a struggle with the powers of Hell, and the Rosary will be the weapon of salvation for the Church. Let us, then, say it for the necessities of the Church and the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.

COLLOQUY.

Let us fervently offer ourselves to Christ through His Mother, determined to fight valiantly for His cause ; and let us beg of Him in return that we may drink deep from the fountain of grace which He opens to us, and may recite with devotion and with good fruit the prayer so strongly recommended in the Church.

Ave Maria.

FEAST OF THE MATERNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

SECOND SUNDAY IN OCTOBER

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The unfortunate King Joseph Emmanuel of Portugal obtained for his kingdom the concession of this feast, which was first kept on the first Sunday in May by virtue of the Decree of the Congregation of Rites dated January 22, 1757. Since that time the same favour has been extended to various other countries.

The maternity of the Blessed Virgin which we celebrate is her Divine maternity, which was defined at the Council of Ephesus as a dogma of faith amid the applause of the whole Catholic world. We look forward to the time when we shall see a solemn feast established to invoke her as Mother of men.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The third part of this book contains several meditations on the incomparable dignity of the Mother of God. In our desire to celebrate this festival in the spirit of the Church, we shall take the points of our meditation from the proper Antiphons which are recited at Lauds. These direct our attention in turn to the *excellence of the dignity, the qualities required*

from her who is chosen to fill it, the *prerogatives* attached to it, and the world-wide extent of the devotion to Mary.

MEDITATION.

"Fecit mihi magna qui potens est"—*He that is mighty hath done great things to me* (St. Luke i. 49).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the splendour of Heaven, and in that incomparable kingdom one throne nearer than any other to the throne of God, and Mary seated on that throne.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray for an increase of our veneration towards the great Mother of God, and of our confidence in her.

I. THE EXCELLENCE OF THIS DIGNITY.

"Beata es, Virgo Maria, quæ omnium portasti Creatorem"—*Happy art thou, who hast borne the Creator of all things* (First Antiphon at Lauds).

1. After making from the bottom of our hearts an act of faith in the Divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin, let us endeavour to understand a little better her unspeakable exaltation as Mother of God. But if such greatness passes our comprehension, we must draw as near to it as we can, and found our respect for Mary on the connection of her Divine maternity with the power of God, with whom in a certain sense she co-operates, and with the dignity of Christ, in which she shares.

(1) Let us consider the whole extent of the power of God, which is without limit. How great are the works of our Creator in the natural, the

moral, and the supernatural order ! All that has cost God nothing, and it would have been in His power to create in this triple domain wonders a hundred times more astonishing. Do your utmost to imagine things great, and good, and beautiful. God needs but to raise His finger to create things far surpassing them in greatness and goodness and beauty. And yet this God, Whose power is unlimited, could not have invested any created being with a higher dignity than that of the Mother of God. Let us hear the Oracle of the School, St. Thomas Aquinas : " The Blessed Virgin as Mother of God derives from this infinite Being Who is God a dignity which in a certain sense is infinite ; and as there is nothing more excellent than God Himself, so nothing could have been created more excellent than Mary." Unite all the glory of virgins, confessors, and martyrs to that of the Apostles and the Spirits of Heaven ; think of all the sublime and beautiful gifts contained in this glory ; add to them all other gifts that your imagination can conceive, and Mary, Mother of Christ, surpasses them all, as Christ is above His Church—Mary, Mother of God, surpasses them all, as God is above all His creation.

(2) How great is the glory and the dignity of Christ ! That glory and that dignity are reflected upon her alone who consented to receive the Word of God into her womb, and gave to Him that flesh which He condescended to put on. Follow Christ in His hidden life or in His public life, in His sufferings and in His glory, radiant with majesty in Heaven and hidden in the Holy Eucharist—in all and through all He is the Son of Mary. We

declare our belief in this truth as we bow before His Sacramental presence and utter the words :

*" Ave Verum Corpus natum
Ex Maria Virgine."*

" Hail to Thee, true body, sprung
From the blessed Virgin's womb."

2. (1) Let us be generous and constant in our devotion to Mary, and let us say with the Church :
"*Quibus te laudibus esseram nescio*"—"I know not with what praises I shall extol Thee."

(2) At the same time let us try to make our homage in some degree proportioned to her dignity.

II. THE QUALITIES REQUIRED IN MARY.

" In æternum permanes Virgo—Ancillam humilem respexit Dominus "—*Thou remainest a virgin for ever—The eyes of the Lord rest on a humble virgin* (Second and Third Antiphons).

1. To fit Mary for her exalted position two qualities were essentially necessary—a virginal purity and a profound humility. The slightest stain of impurity or pride was incompatible with the dignity of Mother of God. She must have nothing in her which could cause her Son to blush for her, nothing in the least degree opposed to the will of God.

2. The same virtues are required in us as a condition of our receiving the graces and favours of God. Impurity and pride are the chief obstacles to our reception of them. Let us try to purify ourselves from the slightest stain of either, and let us never forget how dearly we pay for giving way to pride or sensuality.

III. THE PREROGATIVES OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.

"Genuisti Qui te fecit, et in æternum permanes virgo—Fecit mihi magna Qui potens est"—Thou remainest a virgin for ever, who didst bring forth Him Who created thee—The Almighty hath done great things in me (Second and Fourth Antiphons).

i. (1) The Divine maternity puts the seal on the virginity of Mary.

(a) It renders that virginity inviolable. Mary, in becoming Mother of God, while still retaining her virginal purity, was a sanctuary which God owed it to Himself to protect against all human profanation. The suggestion that Mary had other children besides Our Lord is a groundless blasphemy.

(b) By virtue of this maternity Mary unites two glories which seem ordinarily to contradict each other: on the one hand, she is more pure than any other virgin; on the other, she eclipses all other mothers by the blessed fruit of her womb.

(2) God desires that Christian virginity should abound in spiritual fruits. Far from us be a purity which is selfish, proud, and slothful. By prayers and good works virginity should be spiritually fruitful. St. Chrysostom, in his sermon on St. Philogonus, says: "If the monks who have fixed their habitation on the tops of the mountains, and have crucified themselves to the world, do not endeavour to help by all means in their power those who are set over our churches, and to console them by their prayers, their union, and their charity; if they do not in every possible way aid those who for God's sake have accepted positions

of responsibility in the midst of danger, their retirement and their poverty are in vain, and their wisdom is but lost labour."

2. (1) God has done great things in Mary. The Divine maternity is the foundation of all her dignity.

(a) In view of this maternity Mary is exempt from original sin.

(b) She receives a larger share of sanctifying grace than any other creature.

(c) She unites in herself all the supernatural gifts bestowed on all other creatures.

(d) In virtue of all these gifts, she is the glorious Queen of Heaven.

(2) Without being able to approach the sublime dignity of the Mother of God, we may so love God that we may be assured of realizing the truth of those magnificent words: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii. 9).

IV. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE HONOUR GIVEN TO MARY.

"*Viderunt eam filiae Sion, et beatissimam prædicaverunt; et reginæ laudaverunt eam*"—The daughters of Sion saw her, and declared her blessed; and the queens praised her (Fifth Antiphon).

1. Honoured in Heaven by the Angels and Saints, glorified on earth by all true children of the Church, Mary will receive at the last judgment the homage of all creatures while they bend the knee before her Divine Son. Such is the univer-

sality of the homage which is given to the Mother of God.

But let us fix our attention to-day on the honours paid her by the daughters of Sion. The most beautiful of these is the joy which they all feel through her, and for which they render their homage to her. The Angels view in Mary the fairest of all creatures ; the Saints recognize in the graces bestowed upon them the effect of Mary's prayers ; all humanity rejoices at the honour conferred upon it, and all the inhabitants of the earth feel that they may approach her with confidence,

COLLOQUY.

Let us, children of Mary, cherish in our hearts this spirit of confidence, and let us unite with the homage of suppliants the affection of dutiful children.

FEAST OF THE PURITY OF MARY

THIRD SUNDAY IN OCTOBER

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—While by the Feast of the Most Pure Heart of Mary we honour principally the holiness of the affections of the Blessed Virgin, and thus go back to the root of her virginity, the feast of this day is the exaltation of that virginity itself and its privileges. Its institution is due to the request of the same monarch to whom we owe the Feast of the Divine Maternity, and was granted by the same Decree of 1757. The date of the celebration is well chosen. The Feast of the Purity of Mary follows that of her Maternity ; to her surpassing dignity it unites that incomparable beauty whose charm, according to the holy Fathers, drew down the Son of God into the womb of a human creature, and thus it completes the description of Mary. *Mary is the Virgin-Mother.*

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—As we desire to admire, to praise, and to invoke Mary, we shall consider in turn the perfection of her virginity, her beauty, and her queenliness.

MEDITATION.

“ *Quam pulchra es, amica mea* ”—*How beautiful art thou, my love* (Cant. iv. 1).

First Prelude.—Let us represent to ourselves the holy house of Nazareth at the moment when the Blessed Virgin declares her virginity to the angel Gabriel.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask the grace to feel a holy love for our dear Mother and her virginal beauty.

I. THE PERFECTION OF THE VIRGINITY OF MARY.

1. Virginity embraces both soul and body. It demands first a fixed purpose, an unalterable resolution, or practically a vow, which is, as it were, the soul of virginity, and gives to its victory over the senses the character of a triumph. It demands also a perfect purity of body, which constitutes the matter and the object of this resolution, of this vow. A virgin, in fact, is one who has made to God the perpetual sacrifice of the supreme enjoyment of the senses.

2. How completely, in all its aspects, was this virginity found in Mary !

(1) The *vow*. By its *duration* it embraced the whole life of the Blessed Virgin. It was made long before she confirmed it in presence of the Angel Gabriel, for, according to a pious tradition, Mary was consecrated to God from her earliest childhood.

By its *force*, the resolution of Mary was not even for an instant shaken by the prospect of having to give up her Divine maternity.

And who shall tell the *extent* of the vow ? It evidently meant the exclusion of all lower affections, of all carnal pleasure, of all sensual gratification.

The *intention* of the Blessed Virgin, in taking this vow, has not been directly revealed to us. But we cannot be wrong in ascribing to it the highest purpose, in saying that it was dictated by the purest love of God.

(2) The *perfect purity of body* resulting from this vow. A miraculous action of God insured the fullest preservation of this perfect purity. The Blessed Virgin was exempt from all those ill-regulated feelings of concupiscence which are in the descendants of Adam the consequence of original sin; in Mary the senses were completely subject to the spirit, and when she became a mother, the joys of maternity consecrated those of virginity.

2. As chastity resides in the soul as in its subject, while the matter of it is in the body, so the chastity which corresponds to our state consists in a firm resolution to withdraw the mind from unlawful objects, and to keep the body pure for the service of God.

(1) Is it *perfect chastity*? The flight of the soul towards God will be all the more lofty because this chastity aims higher, it gives up more, and it is more definite in its purpose. Without rashly adding to our essential duties, let us put before us a high ideal, and accept all the logical consequences of the obligation which we have taken upon us. The perfect and generous fulfilment of our vow will bring us security, merit, and happiness.

Is it *conjugal chastity*? The merit of this is enhanced by the nobility of our motives and by our scrupulous fidelity.

(2) Without possessing any miraculous virtue

over the body, it is nevertheless true that watchfulness and circumspection, and a strict observance of modesty and sobriety, will protect this material part of virtue by helping us to resist the temptations of the flesh.

Let us not forget that every attack on our virtue is a trial which leaves us, if we resist the temptation, stronger and better than before. How do we behave on such occasions? Let us never give way to discouragement if we wish to be sure of a complete victory.

II. THE BEAUTY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

1. "Thou art all fair, my love!" exclaims the heavenly Bridegroom in the Cantic of Canticles, as if entranced by the spotless beauty of his spiritual bride. Before all others, this description applies to Mary; how beautifully is she adorned! In her all virtues attain their highest perfection, the aspirations of her spirit are all pure, the affections of her heart are all holy, all her actions are performed with the purest intentions, and she has nothing to blush for before God, the Angels, or men.

2. A perfect moral beauty makes us careful to avoid all contact with objects which might defile us, but how far are we from this perfection! How we should blush if our secret thoughts were revealed! But they are revealed already to God and His Angels, as they will one day be to all the world.

Let us fight resolutely against this degrading duplicity. This combat is one of the most important exercises of our spiritual life. Let us put

away from us, from our thoughts, from our intentions, everything that we should be ashamed to confess. Perhaps this will require a serious effort ; the struggle will not be over in a day, but the sacrifices which it entails are not to be compared with the honour and the joy of victory.

III. THE QUEENLINESS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

1. Ps. xliv. puts before us the picture of a King rejoicing in his strength, and beautiful above the sons of men, and beside him a Queen in gorgeous apparel: she is attended by virgins, who are brought to the King with gladness and rejoicing. From the earliest times Christian virgins have formed the retinue of the Mother of God. Even the paintings in the Catacombs seem to whisper the invocation of the Litany : "*Queen of virgins, pray for us.*"

2. Let us cast our eyes on this retinue. How gloriously it shines in Heaven ! On earth the company of virgins contains souls who, in the silence and obscurity of the cloister, give up their lives to the holy service of God, Angels who sacrifice themselves for the relief of the unfortunate, priests devoted to the spiritual ministry of the elect of Christ. These champions of virginity have, since the earliest ages, been the pride of the Church ; they are still among the flower of her army. But let us not forget that the world in which their work is to be done repudiates purity, misunderstands its dignity, and they are but poor weak mortals. If their victory is glorious, how lamentable would be their fall ! Instead of being the joy and glory of

the Church, do they not run a risk of being her shame and reproach ?

COLLOQUY.

Let our meditation become a prayer for these different groups of virgins, in which we will ask their Queen to secure the perfection of their virginity and lead them into the palace of their King. And then let us address the King Himself, and, in the words of the Psalmist, pray Him to gird His sword upon His thigh, and shoot His arrows, not to strike down His enemies, but to touch the hearts of those who have sworn to love Him only and others for His sake.

Ave Maria.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE TEMPLE

NOVEMBER 21

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—Under the old law, Jewish parents were accustomed to consecrate their children to God, that they might devote themselves to His service in the Temple, and, according to an ancient tradition, Mary was thus offered to God at a very early age: one of the apocryphal Gospels says that she was only three years old at the time.

The Feast of the Presentation of Mary is kept by the Greeks and Armenians, as well as the Latins, on November 21; in the Greek Church it is called the Feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple. Simeon Metaphrastes speaks of it as established at Constantinople in 730, and in 1143 the Emperor Emmanuel Comnenus mentions it among the feasts known to the whole Church. At the request of the Ambassador of the King of Cyprus to Pope Gregory XI., who was then residing at Avignon, the Papal Curia adopted it in 1372. Passing thence into several other kingdoms and churches, the solemnity was introduced into the Roman Breviary by Sixtus IV., abolished by St. Pius V., and restored by Sixtus V., principally

in consequence of the representations of Father Turrian, S.J. Pope Clement VIII. approved the Office in its present form, in which the Presentation is mentioned only in the collect, the fourth lesson (taken from St. John Damascene), and the response after the Eighth Nocturn.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Many pious and learned writers, and even great theologians, believe that Mary, by a special privilege, received the perfect use of reason in the very first moment of her existence. The present feast, then, recalls to us her vow of virginity comprised in the entire offering of herself, or the solemn ratification of that consecration. Many religious communities have been led by this belief to adopt the practice of taking or renewing their vows on this day. In any case, it is impossible to doubt that Mary, from the first dawn of reason, was consecrated wholly to God. Three points, then, are naturally indicated for our meditation : her offering of herself was (1) *prompt* ; (2) *entire* ; (3) *perpetual*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Deus cordis mei et pars mea Deus in æternum* ”
—*Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever* (Ps. lxxii. 26).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine St. Joachim and St. Anne leading their little daughter up the steps of the Temple.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to give to the complete sacrifice of Mary that admiration which, while it increases our reverence for our dear Mother, kindles in us a resolution to imitate her.

I. THE JOYFUL PROMPTNESS OF THE OFFERING OF MARY.

I. The offering of Mary was prompt, and she made it joyfully.

(1) *Prompt.*—Scarcely had Mary begun to understand the nature of God when she felt an irresistible desire to return to Him. As she came from Him, so she hastened to take refuge with Him. To whom else could she turn but to God? How beautiful it is to contemplate the early life of the Blessed Virgin, and the consolation she felt all through her life of having belonged to God, and God only, from the first moment of her being!

(2) *Joyful in its Promptness.*—She gave herself up, but without any regret. Her heart was full of joy and holy pride when she felt that she was accepted by a God of infinite goodness and holiness.

2. (1) In our relations with God, have we realized the truth of the proverb, *Bis dat qui cito dat*, *He gives twice who gives quickly*, and the words of Holy Scripture "God loveth a cheerful giver"? It may be that years of sinful living have kept us far from God, and that when grace has urged us to return we have delayed and made excuses. How we have hesitated, and how ungenerous we have been! How we have wished in our hearts that God would be satisfied with less! And at last we have turned to Him as if under compulsion and against our will.

(2) We must make up for this wasted time, for this lamentable want of generosity towards God, by a perfect readiness to do all that we can to serve Him. Perhaps now we live for God, but we

need to renew our offering again and again with cheerfulness, and prove our sincerity by laying aside all hesitation and sluggishness in His service.

II. THE COMPLETENESS OF THE OFFERING OF MARY.

1. Mary was not only given *promptly* to God, but she was also given *entirely*. No venial sin, no blemish of any kind, impaired the perfection of the offering. No created thing could restrain her in her zeal for God ; nothing could tempt her or turn her for a moment from her Creator. On the contrary, all things around her served only as additional incentives, urging her towards that God Whom she loved so well. All her feelings and affections combined to form an example of a perfect life, given entirely to God.

2. How imperfect are all our offerings ! How many things distract us from God ! Weigh well the formulæ of self-consecration which are put before the faithful. Can we repeat them sincerely ? Whether priests or religious, are we so entirely devoted to God that we can in good faith subscribe to these professions ? A really complete offering implies the renunciation of all the good things of this world, and yet we find ourselves seeking after the comforts and luxuries of life. It demands the severance of natural ties which hinder our progress towards perfection, and we refuse to endure the separations which the service of God requires. It involves renunciation of self, of interior satisfaction, and yet we crave for sensible

consolations, and allow ourselves to be cast down by the least feeling of spiritual dryness.

How inconsiderate we are in thus dividing our allegiance ! for we lay up only trouble and vexation for ourselves, and the division of our affections leads to heart-rending anguish.

III. THE PERPETUITY OF THE OFFERING.

1. Mary belonged to God *irrevocably*. Neither time nor the accidents of life could ever for a moment shake her resolution. Not only was her offering, prompt and complete as it was, never withdrawn, but she was always perfectly willing, if necessary, to renew the sacrifice which had once been made.

2. (1) How excellent a thing is constant perseverance in good ! What a proof of high character and what a victory over oneself ! The man who perseveres seems to rise superior to time and the chances of this life, and to belong already to eternity.

If we have not retracted our promise or our offering, have we thoroughly realized what perfect constancy means ? It is not enough to accept our position with resignation ; it means that we must be ready and willing, whenever necessary, to repeat the irrevocable act of dedication. Have not our difficulties and trials hitherto made us look back and indulge in reflections whose only result is to weaken our will and lessen our merit ? These repinings are the canker-worm of our good actions.

(2) Let us exert our will and often renew our good intentions, and thus strive to attain to perfect constancy.

COLLOQUY.

While we rejoice with our dear Mother, let us beg her to obtain for us the grace to imitate her. Let us ungrudgingly renew the sacrifice of all we possess for God's sake, and say to Him with St. Ignatius : " O Eternal Lord of all things, with the support of Thy help and Thy grace I come to make the offering of my whole self to Thee. In presence of Thy infinite goodness, in the sight of Thy glorious Mother and all the Saints, I protest that my will and desire are all for Thy greater glory, and that I am ready to share with Thee all the insults and outrages that are offered to Thee, and to sacrifice all interior and exterior consolation for Thy sake, if it please Thy sacred Majesty to choose and accept me for this purpose."

FEAST OF THE PATRONAGE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

SOME SUNDAY IN NOVEMBER

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST. — Pope Alexander VII., by a Decree of July 28, 1656, instituted for Spain a Feast of the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin in commemoration of all the victories gained by the Kings of Spain over the Moors, heretics, and other enemies, from the sixth century to the reign of Philip IV. Later on other parts of the Christian world obtained permission to celebrate the feast of that patronage of which nations and religious orders are equally proud. A similar feast has been for centuries kept among the Greeks, and is still celebrated among the Russians, Ruthenians, and Servians on October 1.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION. — The mention of patronage suggests on the one hand weakness and danger, and on the other strength and protection. The Feast of the Patronage of Mary compels us to turn our eyes and our hearts towards our protectress, our eyes full of admiration and our hearts full of fervent gratitude. We shall consider these three points in the meditation: (1) Our need of help; (2) the strength which is ready to help us; (3) the festival.

MEDITATION.

“Beatus vir cujus est auxilium abs te”—Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee (Ps. lxxxiii. 6).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine we see the Mother of God in the glory of Heaven, near the throne of her Divine Son, radiant with happiness and goodness.

Second Prelude.—Let us pray for the grace to cherish an ever-increasing confidence in Mary.

I. OUR NEED.

I. Let us try to realize our need. *Physically* we are surrounded by dangers which we cannot avert. Do we even know the enemies against whom we have to defend ourselves? Our troubles may come by accident, or they may be the result of unfriendly design. Nay, even good-will does harm sometimes, for well-disposed friends make mistakes, and a fatal blow is struck by a hand which is meant to be protective. We are as constantly in danger as the poor fisherman exposed in his frail barque to the fury of the tempest. And it is the same in the moral order. Weak and easily tempted, we find ourselves surrounded by seductions and bad examples. The race we have to run is only a short one, but it is long for our perseverance; and if the difficulty or the danger of the course discourages us, that discouragement will be a serious defeat. St. Augustine was wise when he came to the conclusion that he ought to thank God as much for the evil that he had avoided as for the good that he had done. The

perversion of an intellect easily blinded, the corruption of a heart easily led astray, presumption and despondency—all these are the evils that we have to dread.

2. How many reasons we have for humility and for distrust in our own strength !

II. THE PATRONAGE OF MARY.

1. We have here a double question, and a very important one. Is Mary *able*, and is she *willing*, to extend to us the shelter of her patronage ? It is an easy question to answer.

(1) She *can*. Is there, indeed, any weakness that she cannot strengthen, any poverty that she cannot enrich ? Is there anybody that she cannot cure, any soul that she cannot transform ? Who is not sure of the answer to these questions ? This simple reason is enough to show Mary's unlimited power. Every evil, every present danger, comes from sin. All help, all salvation, must come from the blood of Jesus Christ, from that grace which, as St. Paul says, abounded much more than the sin (Rom. v. 15-20). And Mary disposes of all the graces of Jesus Christ, because He grants to her merits and to her maternity an unlimited power of intercession.

(2) She *will*. Is it not enough to remember that she is our Mother in order to persuade ourselves of this ? What son can doubt a good mother ? God Himself has provided for the helplessness of children by filling their mothers' hearts with inexhaustible tenderness, and thus has shown His care for their physical welfare. Is it possible, then,

that this same God would permit such distress to exist, and give us a Mother without also giving her a heart to feel for us ?

2. It is necessary that we should have a firm belief in the power and goodness of our Heavenly Mother, in order that we may have confidence and be encouraged to have recourse to her with assurance of being heard.

But we must not think that it is enough to believe in the power and goodness of Mary in order to obtain her aid. God in His wisdom will not save us without our own co-operation. Means of grace are abundantly provided in the supernatural order, but we must fulfil the necessary conditions if we wish to obtain the benefit of them, and the condition of our obtaining the protection of Mary is that we should have recourse to her with humility and confidence.

III. THE FEAST OF THE PATRONAGE.

The Feast of the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin is the expression of our admiring gratitude, called forth by the wonders of the goodness of Mary.

1. See how universal is the recourse to her protection. Villages, cities, whole kingdoms (France, for example) are dedicated to Mary. The New World does not yield to the Old in devotion to the Mother of God. Religious orders vie with each other in their appeals for her aid. How many of them make use of her name in the title of their order ! How many pious legends attest the special confidence which monks and nuns place in her ! What founder has failed to put his children under

her protection, and to inscribe this condition in his spiritual testament? There are certain great names of Saints which stand out conspicuously in the history of the Church, and is there one of these who does not lay stress on the duty of devotion to Mary? This devotion is of all time. General as it was in the first ages of Christianity, it has ever since been a characteristic of the true Church. The Eastern liturgy, like that of the West, is full of invocations of Mary, and does not hesitate to address her by the sweet names of our *life*, our *sweetness*, and our *hope*. And what splendid testimony is given on the same point by the encyclicals, the writings, and acts of so many Sovereign Pontiffs!

2. With this unanimity in prayer compare the expressions of gratitude to which so many sacred buildings bear witness—the inscriptions they bear, the offerings that are made in them, the many festivals instituted in memory of the favours of the Blessed Virgin. The multitudes who owe to her their health of mind and body give the same testimony.

Men of all ranks and conditions who rejoice at having had recourse to Mary show that the Church has obeyed an irresistible impulse in keeping the feast not only of the Blessed Virgin, but also of her Patronage.

COLLOQUY.

In this age let us children of the Church have recourse to Mary with full confidence, and tell her our manifold needs. Let us say this prayer, meditating on the truth of each word :

"*Sub tuum præsidium*"—To thy patronage. Let us ponder well the full value of that protection.

"*Confugimus*"—we fly. Pressing forward to thee in all our troubles.

"*Sancta Dei genitrix*"—O holy Mother of God. This is the title which recalls and explains to us thy power.

"*Nostras deprecationes*"—Our petitions. Confident, fervent, and persevering.

"*Ne despicias*"—despise not. Though we humbly confess our unworthiness.

"*In necessitatibus nostris*"—in our necessities. Which we piously call to mind one by one.

"*Sed a periculis cunctis*"—But from all dangers. So grave and so numerous.

"*Libera nos semper*"—deliver us always. By thy continual help.

"*Virgo gloriosa et benedicta*"—O ever-glorious and blessed Virgin. Remember the glory of all thy favours. The benefits that we have received call forth our gratitude.

And in asking for new favours, we do not forget all that we owe thee.

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

DECEMBER 8

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

THE Immaculate Conception is, for the age in which we live, the principal feast of Mary, and this book has been written to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its solemn proclamation; this great subject demands our special attention.

1. We begin with some preliminary reflections on the evolution of dogma and Papal infallibility, which may serve to enlighten the minds of some persons, and to reassure those who may be troubled at hearing that this great privilege of Mary was not at first formally defined, and that, until the decision of the Church, the definition met with opposition from holy and illustrious men.

2. We offer meditations for a whole novena of preparation for the feast.

3. We propose for the feast itself two distinct meditations—the first connected with the novena, the second having less relation to it. The subject is treated a third time from a theological point of view in the first section of the Meditations for the Saturdays of the Year.

DOGMATIC EVOLUTION AND PAPAL INFALLIBILITY.

In the supernatural economy of Revelation, God has marvellously combined the progress of grace

with the requirements of our nature. The unity and stability of the faith are consistent with a real development of knowledge ; the gift of God requires the exercise of our intelligence, for infallibility does not relieve us from any responsibility, and it is one of the strongest confirmations of Catholic truth that it combines rest and progress, certitude and inquiry, in a manner which is not to be found in any other religious body outside the Church.

The Christian revelation was completed in the time of the Apostles ; since that time Our Lord has not by Himself nor by the Holy Spirit added to the number of those theoretical and practical truths by the light of which the human race must live and perfect itself for the term of its earthly destiny. Our act of faith and that of St. Peter embrace the same body of truth, not one article more or less ; our faith is the same as that of the faithful in the Catacombs, and our most remote descendants will believe what we believe. There is but one formula for us, and there will be the same for them : “ I believe whatever the Catholic Church proposes to be believed, and this because God, Who is the Sovereign Truth, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has revealed all these things to this His Church.” And in saying this, we Christians, past, present, and future, refer to the same object, for the Church will never propose to our belief anything but the truths contained in the sacred deposit delivered to the Apostles of Jesus Christ, and by them to the Christian world.

But what truths are contained therein ? Besides those necessary fundamental truths, the evidence

for which is so clear that no reasonable person can have any doubt on the subject, it is easy to understand that there may be many others which do not immediately attract attention, or which for a certain time are enveloped in obscurity. Does a single glance exhaust all the beauty of a wide landscape? A long and careful contemplation of it reveals features which are new because they were before unperceived. The result of discussion on the text of laws passed many years ago is that their meaning is made clear. In the same manner there is nothing unreasonable in saying that, as the spectator or the jurist advances in his knowledge of the picture or of the legal enactment, so Christians in the course of ages acquire a clearer view of the truths revealed in the time of the Apostles.

God certainly could from the beginning have given to men a full understanding of all that He had revealed if He had wished to do so, but He did not do so, because it was His will that His religion should be one of life and progress. The oak begins by being an acorn; even the body of man goes through successive changes of wonderful development, and still remains the same body; the spirit advances continually in wisdom, and the will in virtue. In the same way there must be a science of faith, and that science must be progressive; and so it is that the Church has from age to age acquired a clearer knowledge of truths which she has held only in an indistinct manner, and, as it were, without being conscious of them.

In order that the faith of the Church may be unchangeable, it is necessary and sufficient that the same truths should always have been believed

at least with implicit faith, and that the explicit and formal acceptance of any dogma should never be withdrawn. And this immutability of the faith is shown conclusively by history : the Church has always joined with her explicit declarations an act of implicit belief in all that is contained in the Holy Scriptures and ecclesiastical tradition, the two channels through which is transmitted the Divine revelation which was completed when the last of the Apostles died, and she has never gone back on any definition of faith.

Hence it is easy to see that certain truths may well be compared to stars which are at first hidden below the horizon, and are afterwards only half perceived, until they shine in all their splendour in the firmament to which they have always belonged. The first period is one of silence ; in the second the question is raised, and opinions are freely expressed on both sides. The discussions thus raised demand an irreformable decision, not for the purpose of communicating to the world a new revelation, but to inform the world that such and such a truth is an integral part of the ancient revelation.

It may, perhaps, be asked whether there has been no change of faith on the part of those persons who have legitimately opposed the definition of a truth during the second period. Not at all. Their denial has never been a part of their creed. The result of their reasoning has been that they have formed an opinion, or remained in a state of uncertainty, but always in subordination to the judgment of the Church ; and when the Church has spoken, they have not changed their faith, but

their opinion, by reason of their general profession: "I believe all that God has revealed, and all that the Church proposes to be believed." Moreover, before any definition of the Church, every time that they said, "I believe all that God has revealed," they virtually retracted any contrary error into which they had involuntarily fallen.

These considerations clearly show the work which God, the Author of all revelation, leaves to human efforts, the study of every point of doctrine in all its various aspects and analogies, in its traditional foundations, and in its relations with other revealed truths.

In this great work Christ has not left His Church or its Supreme Pastor unaided. The Church cannot err in matters of faith, nor the Sovereign Pontiff in his definition of what is to be believed. But we must understand well what this inerrancy or infallibility of the Vicar of Jesus Christ really means. It does not imply any miraculous manifestation from on high, but it is a guarantee which accompanies the well-considered decisions of the Sovereign Authority. The infallible Pope is not enabled by any gift of supernatural intuition to penetrate with a single glance all the depths of revelation; he speaks as the head of the Christian society, and as responsible to God. Before defining a truth, he may have been ignorant, he may have hesitated; then it is his duty to inquire, to wait, to pray, to neglect no human means of investigation. At length, at the suitable moment, he pronounces his definitive decision, which is thus given forth to the world bearing the stamp of the most careful deliberation and of a Divine promise.

Such are the general principles universally accepted in the Church. Mature deliberations have always preceded and accompanied dogmatic definitions, which from the earliest times have been pronounced by the Councils of the Church either to refute heresies or to dispel doubts and uncertainty ; and the result of these definitions has been to set forth in clear and precise terms the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the Divine maternity of Mary, the Holy Eucharist, grace, the Sacraments, the authority of the Supreme Pontiff. It will be the same with the dogmas which may be defined in the future ; for, in spite of the spirit of Antichrist, the age of dogmatic definitions has not yet come to an end.

The Immaculate Conception belongs to that class of truths of which it was not necessary for the Church at all times to have a clear understanding. For some time it had not been explicitly taught, and its definition met with opposition in a later age from holy and learned Catholics, who were led astray by specious objections grounded on truths already defined, such as the necessity of redemption and the universality of original sin. It was then the mission and work of other learned and holy men to solve these difficulties, and to show that the belief in Mary's sinlessness was perfectly consistent with the dogmas fully possessed by the Church ; while the faithful Christian people, with a feeling more certain, more inspired by God than the arguments of private authorities, acclaimed at once and with enthusiasm the high prerogative of Mary. When once they were led to express an opinion on the subject, they could

not bring themselves to admit any stain in that Mother of God whom they had been taught to salute as full of grace, or any defect in that woman who was represented as overcoming the Devil.

And thus we come to answer indirectly the famous question of Harnack, "When and to whom was this dogma revealed?" It is not necessary to specify any one precise moment, or to mention any particular person. To explain our meaning in a few words, the revelation of this dogma is composed of three successive stages. Commenced in that passage of the Book of Genesis (the "proto-evangel," as it is called) in which is announced the fundamental enmity which shall enable a woman by her seed to triumph over the serpent and his seed; continued in the beautiful scene of the Gospel where an Angel salutes Mary as full of grace, and begs her to consent to become the Mother of God, this revelation is completed in the interpretation of these texts which God left to His Church by tradition. From the very foundation of the Church Mary was known as the Second Eve, triumphant over the Devil, as all-holy, as clothed with a dignity which was irreconcilable with any idea of impurity or sin. Did this triple concept, transmitted unchanged from age to age, exclude the contagion of the sin of Adam? When, after many centuries, this question was formally asked, the Church, after long consideration, came to the conclusion that her traditional faith in the holiness and the prerogatives of Mary, and in the enmity put by God between the Mother of God and the Devil, was inconsistent

with the belief that she could have been subject to the stain of original sin.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—Many Christian festivals had their origin in the East, the cradle of Christianity, and when we turn our thoughts to the institution of the solemnity which we now celebrate under the title of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we naturally look to the Greek Church. The monks, who were accustomed to devote their attention to religious questions, and who, as we have seen, had kept in honour the memory of the Blessed Virgin since the fifth century, were the first, undoubtedly, to see that they could not refuse to the Mother of God the honour given to St. John Baptist, whose miraculous conception as recorded in the Gospels was already celebrated. From the monasteries pious persons in the world received the idea and the practice, which were taken up by ecclesiastical authority and recommended from the pulpit. A sermon of John, Bishop of the Isle of Eubœa or Negropont, proves that in the eighth century the feast existed without being yet universal. In the following century, according to a sermon of George of Nicomedia, it seems already to have become general. Contemporary mention of the same, engraved in marble, and forming part of a calendar, was found at Naples in 1742. The feast is included in the ecclesiastical calendar of the Emperor Basil, and the Constitution promulgated in 1166 by the Emperor Emmanuel Comnenus mentions it among the feasts officially adopted by the Empire.

It may be added that the feast is kept in the

Greek Church, not on December 8, but on December 9; and it is often mentioned under the title of the Conception of St. Anne, mother of the Mother of God, owing to the fact that formerly, in both Churches, regard was had to the active rather than to the passive conception; and the Conception of Our Lord was called the Conception of the Blessed Virgin.

Until lately learned men connected the introduction of the festival in the East with its celebration in the South of Italy. After having received it from Greece, the people of this part of the peninsula seem to have made it known to the Normans, with whom they had frequent relations from the beginning of the eleventh century, and the Normans brought it into Normandy and England. It was, in fact, celebrated in certain English monasteries at the end of the eleventh century, and the feast was for some time called, both in England and in France, the *Feast of the Norman Nation*.

Quite recently Father Thurston, S.J., has shown that, without denying the liturgical influence of the Eastern Church, it must be admitted that there was another channel by which the feast came into England. From the ninth century Ireland included in its calendars a Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, under the title of the Great Feast of Mary ("Feil mar Marie uage").

To Ireland, then, is due the honour of having inaugurated in the Western Church the Feast of the Conception of Mary, as England may claim that of having produced the oldest treatise written formally to defend the glorious privilege of the

Immaculate Virgin. This was long attributed to St. Anselm, but it is now conclusively proved by Fathers Thurston and Slater to have been the work of the monk Eldmar, in the beginning of the twelfth century. The Irish feast was at first kept on May 2 or 3.

The solemnity for some time was neglected, but afterwards found zealous defenders in the two Anselms, the celebrated Archbishop of Canterbury and his nephew. It also gained considerable popularity from what was called "the legend of the Abbot Helsin," a story which was current in the twelfth century. This priest, when travelling from England to Denmark, found himself in danger of shipwreck. He called upon God for help, and suddenly an old man in pontifical vestments (probably St. Nicolas) appeared to him, and promised him a safe journey on condition that he should undertake on his arrival to celebrate the Feast of the Mother of God on December 8. The Abbot was saved from shipwreck, and fulfilled his promise.

Various illustrious persons opposed the introduction of the feast, amongst others St. Bernard, but without being able to check the movement. In the thirteenth century the General Chapter of the Franciscans, assembled at Pisa in 1263, adopted the feast for the whole order, and in consequence of this decision it was celebrated to some extent everywhere—at least, in convents—even at Avignon and Rome, under the eyes of the Pope. Rome, without yet accepting it officially, permitted the celebration, as mentioned by St. Thomas Aquinas. Many Churches were en-

couraged by the favourable declaration of the Council of Bâle (September 17, 1439) to adopt it, and at length a Franciscan, sitting on the throne of St. Peter—Sixtus IV.—caused it to be inscribed in the calendar of the Diocese of Rome, and attached indulgences to its celebration. Pope Clement VIII. raised it to the rank of a major double, Clement IX. added the Octave, and Clement XI., by his Decree of December 6, 1708, imposed it on the universal Church. The Constitution of Innocent IX. of November 10, 1644, made use of the Mass and Office obligatory for Spain, and Pius IX. did the same for the whole Church.

In the meantime there was much controversy as to the meaning to be attached to the feast. In 1622 Gregory XV., much as he favoured the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, ordered that in the Mass and Office mention should not be made of the Immaculate Conception, but of the Conception of Mary Immaculate. But in 1661 Alexander VII. took a decided step towards the formal acceptance of the dogma by defining the object of the feast. He declared that it was to celebrate the sanctification of Mary at the first moment of her existence. At the request of many Bishops of France, Gregory XVI. granted permission to introduce into the preface of the day the words, "the Immaculate Conception."

The rest is well known. On December 8, 1854, Pius IX., confirmed in his purpose by 484 distinctly favourable answers of the Episcopate out of 543 answers received (18 only opposed the definition), proceeded to the solemn proclamation

of the dogma. On September 25, 1863, he approved the Office and the Mass at present in use, and gave to the feast its definitive name of the Immaculate Conception. On December 24 of the same year the invocation of Mary Immaculate was inserted in the Litany, and on November 30, 1879, Leo XIII. raised the feast to the rank of a double of the first class, with a vigil. Finally, Pius X. has just (1904) presided over the public celebration which recalled the happy day when the high prerogative of Mary Immaculate was proclaimed to the whole world.

The meaning now attached to the solemnity of December 8 is quite plain. On that day the Church offers its homage full of faith in the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. There is nothing, however, to show that the feast had always the same signification. Among the Greeks especially the institution seems to be connected with certain apocryphal accounts of the miraculous circumstances in which St. Joachim and St. Anne obtained from Heaven the gift of their child ; and even in the West we must admit that the great Anselm, though an advocate of the institution of the feast, was an opponent of the dogma. We may nevertheless conclude from the enthusiasm with which the proclamation of the dogma was received that in all probability there was always a tradition favourable to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. But the doctrinal interpretation is not within the scope of this work ; it is enough for us to remember that the precise signification of the feast was authoritatively fixed by Alexander VII. in 1661,

NOVENA IN HONOUR OF THE
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OFFERED IN
UNION WITH THE CHOIRS OF
HEAVENLY SPIRITS

FIRST DAY : UNDER THE PROTECTION OF
THE HOLY ANGELS.

THE MOTIVES FOR HONOURING MARY IMMACULATE.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this first exercise we shall consider some of the reasons for honouring the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and for preparing ourselves in a special manner for that feast which Catholic Ireland since the beginning of the ninth century has called the *Great Feast of Mary*. We shall see how this honour is (1) *pleasing to God* ; (2) *pleasing to the Blessed Virgin* ; and (3) *profitable to ourselves*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Lætetur anima vestra in misericordia ejus, et non confundemini in laude ipsius* ”—*Let your soul rejoice in His mercy, and you shall not be confounded in His praise* (Ecclus. li. 37).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the Blessed Virgin resplendent with beauty, clothed, as it were, with the brightness of the sun, her brow crowned with a diadem of twelve stars, her foot

crushing the head of a serpent which writhes in impotent fury.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to find in the motives for honouring the Immaculate Virgin a special fervour in making the novena.

I. THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD.

1. (1) *The Proof from Reason.*—The works of God should be the object of our praise. We are here in presence of a miracle of His grace, the masterpiece of the redemption, in which is shown all the power of Christ triumphant over sin. Not only does that power cure the disease of sin, and repair the mischief that sin has caused, but it prevents the evil and preserves from all stain. All other men are like shipwrecked mariners who have been rescued by Jesus from the deep; but the waves have had no power over Mary: Jesus has commanded them to subside before her. How pleasing it must be to God that we should praise and glorify Him for the beauty of His Mother!

(2) *The proof from fact* is drawn from the action of God Himself: God calls us to admire this effect of His mercy. At the commencement of our history, this privilege was foretold under the symbol of the avenging and triumphant enmity put between the woman and her seed on the one hand, and the serpent and its seed on the other. How admirable is the design of God, which would not even for an hour leave humanity without hope! Humanity enters sadly and humbly upon the sorrowful way of expiation, but is comforted from the first by the prospect of ultimate victory.

Again, many of the figures of the Old Testament, without being directly applicable to the Blessed Virgin, call up the thought of her so naturally that they seem to be intended by God to stimulate our devotion towards our Immaculate Mother. The Saints have long been accustomed to unite Jesus and Mary in the explanation of these inspired symbols. The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception abounds in images drawn from the sacred Scriptures: the ark of the covenant; the honey which Samson found in the mouth of the lion; the fleece of Gedeon, at first wet with dew when all around was dry, and afterwards dry while there was dew on all the ground; the lily flowering in the midst of the thorns; and so many other facts and figures, if they are first a representation of Christ, remind us also in a wonderful manner of His Mother, conceived without stain of sin. Is not Mary Immaculate that ark which contained more than the tables of the law of fear, since she bore the Author of grace and of the law of love? Is she not the honey of perfect sweetness, the excellent fruit of the death of Christ? Is she not the only one preserved from the bitter waters of sin, and at the same time made fruitful by the dew of original grace? And does not the whiteness of the lily symbolize her perfect purity?

But a still more significant fact is the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. It required an extraordinary interposition of Providence to lead the Church to this solemn act, which seemed to be hindered by the failure of many holy and learned doctors to understand the mystery aright. The

Devil used all his skill to conceal his defeat, or to render the solemn proclamation of that defeat impossible. But God, jealous for the honour of His Mother, using that gentle force which characterizes His action, has little by little made the magnificent victory of Mary shine before the eyes of all the world. To honour this high prerogative is to do what God has done, to imitate Him ; and is not this the best way to please Him ?

2. We may here marvel at the goodness of God, Who takes pleasure in the honours conferred upon His creatures who are faithful to Him, and we have reason to rejoice for Mary. Let us resolve in keeping this novena to show our love to God Himself. Perhaps we have never thought of cultivating a devotion to Mary from the highest of all motives, which is the love of God.

II. THE SATISFACTION OF MARY.

1. To honour the Immaculate Conception is also to give the greatest pleasure to Mary, for this is truly the most exalted of all her prerogatives.

(1) Rather than sacrifice her purity, Mary would have been willing to give up the honour of being the Mother of God. Such is the opinion of the holy Fathers. How highly, then, did she value the perfection of her original purity ! Moreover, the Immaculate Conception is truly the holy mountain on which that palace of purity was founded. Her freedom from all concupiscence, her exemption from all venial sin, her perpetual virginity—all these flow from thence as from their natural source.

(2) This reasoning is confirmed by facts in recent times. Let us remember the apparitions of Lourdes. When earnestly implored to declare who she was, the Blessed Virgin thus described herself: "I am the Immaculate Conception." When God said to Moses, "I am Who am" (Exod. iii. 14), He revealed that Name above all names which the Jews feared to pronounce; and did not Mary, when she called herself the Immaculate one, reveal the title which she valued above all others?

2. Let us acknowledge how natural is this preference of Mary, and let us, her children, led by our gratitude for the favours which we have received from her maternal hand, find in the high esteem in which Mary holds this great gift a new reason for fervour during this novena; and let us tell her so with simplicity.

III. THE PROFIT TO OURSELVES.

1. Let us see first what meaning we attach to this last reason for our devotion. Is it not natural for an affectionate father, who is sincerely loved by his children in return, to rejoice at the confidence which his son reposes in him? This confidence has in it nothing narrow, nothing mean, nothing selfish. So also we love Mary, and rejoice in the honour done to her; therefore, knowing that we please her by showing our confidence in her, we seek to strengthen that confidence, and with that happy end in view, we appeal to reason and hope to enable us to see clearly the great benefits which are procured for us by the honour paid

to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.

(1) *The Proof from Reason.*—Mary has loaded us with benefits, and we cannot honour her without drawing down upon ourselves new favours ; and we cannot use a more powerful plea than by glorifying that title which she loves, which proclaims the perfection of her virginal purity.

(2) *The Proof from Fact.*—Let us look around us. What wonders are wrought in the name of the Immaculate Conception ! Let us recall the sanctifying effect of the invocation, “ By thy virginity and Immaculate Conception, O most chaste Virgin, obtain for me purity of soul and body,” the graces of conversion due to the miraculous medal, Lourdes and its miracles without end.

2. Let our hearts dwell with loving confidence, and let us decide at this moment what graces we should ask for in this novena, and what acts of devotion we should offer in order to obtain them.

COLLOQUY.

Let us go to Mary through the choirs of Angels, in order to offer her our resolutions, our homage, and our petitions, and let us recite devoutly :

“ *Tota pulchra es, O Maria !
Et macula originalis non est in te.*”

“ Thou art all fair, O Mary !
And the stain of original sin is not in thee.”

SECOND DAY: UNDER THE PROTECTION OF
THE HOLY ARCHANGELS.

THE PROTO-EVANGEL.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The name of “proto-evangel” has long been used to denote the passage in the third chapter of Genesis, in which, after the fall of our first parents, God pronounced His just sentence upon the Devil, represented by the serpent which had been the cause of their transgression.

It is necessary to observe that the literal meaning of these verses has been the subject of much discussion among Catholic commentators. In the woman who is the enemy of the serpent and in her seed many understand Eve and the human race, victorious over the Devil in Jesus Christ and through Him. Others are of opinion that the words must be taken to mean both Eve and Mary—Eve in the literal sense and Mary by a figure. The instinctive horror and enmity with which Eve and her descendants regard the serpent are the type of the complete and victorious enmity by which Mary and her Son triumph over the Devil. Many highly esteemed commentators and most theologians understand that by the woman and her seed are meant directly and exclusively Mary and the Blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus.

It is not for us to settle this controversy ; but, after taking note of the different interpretations, we may certainly adapt our meditation to the latter opinion, which is clearly expressed in the

Bull defining the dogma, and which Father Flunk, S.J., declares to be the only admissible one. The proto-evangel, then, outlines the Divine plan of the redemption of the world. We shall, therefore, consider in succession (1) *the turning away of the wrath of God*; (2) *the establishment of the enmity*; and (3) *the prediction of victory*.

"Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius"—*I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed* (Gen. iii. 15).

First Prelude.—Let us recall this scene, the last scene of the earthly paradise, in which God, before passing His sentence of death upon the man who had betrayed his trust, and condemning to sorrow and subjection the woman who had tempted him, decreed against the Devil, the original instigator of the sin, that supreme humiliation from which we derive our greatest encouragement: "I will put an enmity"—and oh, how great shall that enmity be!—"between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; and it [that is, according to the Hebrew, her seed or descendants] shall crush thy head."

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the earthly paradise at the moment when Adam and Eve are struck with dismay at the sight of God. At their feet is the serpent, the instrument of the Devil.

Third Prelude.—Let us pray for grace so to contemplate the glories of Mary that we may offer her this special devotion, which, according to the Saints, is a pledge of salvation, a guarantee of purity, and a powerful means of attaining perfection.

I. THE TURNING AWAY OF THE WRATH OF GOD.

The turning away of wrath makes us hate sin and bless the Divine mercy.

I. (1) *The Hatred of Sin*.—Let us try to imagine the terror and dismay which overwhelmed Adam and Eve as they stood motionless before that angry God from Whose presence they sought in vain to escape. They read in His look their condemnation; they saw what they were about to lose, what misery they were to bring upon themselves, the sufferings in which they had involved all their posterity.

And what was the cause, the only cause, of all this? Sin, that sin which presented itself under the attractive aspect of a delicious fruit and of a new knowledge—the knowledge of good and evil. This is undoubted truth: *All* suffering comes from sin; by sin death entered into this world, and death is the type of all temporal unhappiness.

The dismay of Adam and Eve puts before us a vivid picture of the disenchantment which follows the commission of sin, especially of sensual sin. It brings before us also the helpless despair which will overwhelm the sinner when, after this life, he appears before the tribunal of that God Whom he has not hesitated to offend.

(2) Let us recognize in sin the great enemy of our happiness; let us be so firmly convinced of this that we may henceforth be proof against all its fascinations; and let us remember well that the same is true of mortal sin and of less grave faults. The path of venial sin, of voluntary neglect of duties, of lukewarmness in their performance, is a path which leads us away from true happiness.

2. (1) *The Divine Mercy*.—Let us consider how many reasons God has for His anger, how many favours we have disregarded, how many gifts we have treated with contempt, how easy and how holy was that law which was transgressed by our first parents. And yet before the punishment He gives us a glimpse of the grace to come; He foretells the rainbow before covering the sky with clouds; He promises the light which shall dispel the darkness.

(2) Let us recognize and admire the designs of the mercy of God towards us. Who can fathom their depth? Who can measure their height or discover their limit? Let us respond to this mercy with a loving confidence, even after our failures; let us remember that it was after the fall of Adam, before the coming of Christ, even without any prayer for grace, that God condescended to bind His sovereign will by a promise of mercy and pardon.

II. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ENMITY.

Let us lay stress on the hostility between the woman and the serpent; let us see what this teaches us of Mary, and profit by the lessons which it contains for us.

I. (1) In foretelling the enmity which He puts between the woman and the Devil, God reveals that a woman will come whose part will be to make war upon Satan. Does not such a warfare imply a radical opposition, a complete and perpetual incompatibility of wills? The Devil is the personification of sin and temptation; the woman who is to come will be distinguished by freedom

from sin and immunity against temptation. Is it possible that that woman should begin by being subject to that original sin over which God promises us the glorious victory to be achieved through her? In this way this enmity prefigures the Immaculate Conception of Mary, for from the beginning the hope of the world has been to see the birth of a woman preserved from original sin.

(2) Let us remark how the great consolation of the human race is promised under the form of an enmity, a perpetual warfare.

2. (1) What consolation are we to draw from this for ourselves? After rejoicing that at the first page of our Holy Scriptures we can rest our eyes on our Immaculate Mother, we must remember that our destiny in this world is not to live in a state of false peace and presumptuous security, but to struggle energetically against the Devil and his spirit, in order to enjoy the consolation that comes from a hard fight and final victory.

(2) But we must enter upon this struggle sustained by a fervent devotion towards the Blessed Virgin. Every act of love we offer her is a declaration of war against our deadly enemy.

III. THE PREDICTION OF VICTORY.

I. *The Prophecy of the Victory and its Characteristics.*—The enmity announced by God is an enmity which is to end in victory for us; it is to be crowned by a complete triumph, and the head of the infernal serpent is to be crushed. But two points are to be noticed in this victory:

(1) The woman is victorious in the blessed fruit

of her womb. She triumphs because she is the Mother of a Son to Whom is given the power to crush the head of the serpent. Mary will owe all to Jesus Christ and His merits. But this aspect of the victory, if it is glorious for the Son, redounds equally to the honour of the Mother. It shows us that Mary is not so much the descendant of our first parents, victims of Hell and its snares, as the Mother of a new Adam, triumphant over the Devil. As the daughter of the first Adam, she should have inherited his imperfection, but as the Mother of the Redeemer, and associated with Him in His work, she could not begin by being subject to the slavery of sin. The cause of the taint must give way to the higher cause of her immunity from sin. Morally one with Jesus, Mary must be immaculate.

(2) Victory comes after struggles, and even then is not won without partial defeats, to which the race of humanity must submit; for, according to the imagery of Holy Scripture, though she shall crush the serpent's head, the serpent shall bruise her heel. The humanity of Jesus nailed to the cross is one bruise of the heel; the treachery of heretics is another; the impiety which insults the Blessed Virgin is another; worst of all is the loss of souls which are drawn into the fatal revolt of Satan.

But the impotence of the enemy is shown forth in the mention of the place which is to be touched by his efforts. He cannot touch God Himself, nor the Angels of God, nor His Saints. God cannot be wounded except in the persons of His human creatures, and He only permits them to be

bruised in the heel—that is to say, only during the short trials of this present life, and only in the body and their worldly possessions ; never in the soul, unless they voluntarily allow themselves to be led astray. And this partial success of the enemy is counterbalanced by an avenging victory. The Cross of Christ crushes the head of the serpent ; heresies are the occasion for the promulgation of dogmas ; every insult offered to the Blessed Virgin arouses the zeal of her children, and shows forth one of her prerogatives. The loss of the wicked brings into stronger relief the virtue and happiness of the good.

2. These considerations should produce in us two results :

(1) They should give us a sublime assurance, arising from the consciousness of an invincible superiority. While we lean on Jesus and His Mother, we can defy our enemies to do us any harm. What a consoling thought is this amid the troubles of the Church !

(2) But these bruises of the heel touch us in the persons of other men, our brothers. Our own security cannot make us indifferent to their misfortune. If we are not in danger ourselves, our hearts should be touched, and we should remember our duty to have a care for our weaker brethren, and to be brave and vigorous in their defence.

COLLOQUY.

Let us earnestly implore the Mother of God that we may always belong to that blessed race which shall be victorious with her and her Son Jesus.

THIRD DAY : UNDER THE PROTECTION OF
THE CHOIR OF THRONES.THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—If the wisdom of the works of God passes our comprehension, the glimpse of their perfection which reaches us is enough to fill us with admiration. When we set ourselves to search out the reasons for the high prerogative of Mary, we feel our own weakness, but, at the same time, a great hope of the blessings we are to derive from it. We shall consider the Immaculate Conception in three aspects: (1) *The fulfilment of the Divine plan*; (2) *the relations between Mary and the Blessed Trinity*; (3) *her exalted position as Queen of Heaven*.

MEDITATION.

“Omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti”—*Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight* (Wisdom xi. 21).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves in the glory of Heaven a magnificent throne, placed near the throne of Jesus; it is destined for the Mother of our Redeemer.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask earnestly for the grace described in the two preceding meditations, which we shall call henceforth the grace of the novena.

I. THE FULFILMENT OF THE DIVINE PLAN.

I. The Immaculate Conception is necessary for the fulfilment of a Divine plan. "By a wonderful mystery," says Bossuet, "we see our restoration shown forth by the authors of our ruin." God has been pleased to establish a complete contrast between the manner of our fall and the manner of our restoration. We fall under the action of three evil influences—the Devil; the first woman, Eve; and Adam, our first parent. In the Divine work of our restoration we recognize the intervention of the good Angel; Mary, the second Eve; and the spiritual head of regenerated human nature, the second Adam, Jesus.

At the instigation of the Devil, Eve, who had already been tempted herself, offered to Adam the fatal fruit. Mary, persuaded by the Angel, consented to co-operate in the Incarnation of the Word, and offered to the Son of God the elements of that humanity which was to be the fruit of life and of universal salvation.

The Devil tempted our first parents to pride by leading them to disregard the commandment of God; the good Angel reminded Mary of the favours bestowed upon her by God in order to obtain her consent and submission to His will.

The sin of Adam stood alone; one sin of pride in thought, to which he gave way when the Devil said, "You shall be as Gods," caused all the misfortunes of the human race; the merits of Jesus Christ alone procure the happiness of all men, His Mother included.

The sin of Eve historically preceded and led to the fall of Adam ; the grace of Mary is the dawn of the day which our Redeemer is to make glorious over the world.

Eve offered the fatal fruit to Adam, and tempted him to eat it ; Mary, by her beauty, by the charm of her humility, her purity, and her faith, say the holy Fathers, drew the Son of God into her bosom, and gave Him to men.

The Divine plan which has put these contrasts so plainly before us in the fall of man and his restoration to happiness would have been lacking in the completeness which characterizes the works of God if Mary had been even for an instant under the yoke of Satan. In contrast with that Eve who, though born free from sin, placed herself voluntarily under its yoke, we needed a woman invested with a high privilege who, though she would in the ordinary course of nature have been born a slave, was delivered by God from the humiliating bondage.

2. (1) Let us admire the glory and the lustre which God has conferred on the instrument of our reconciliation.

(2) God loves to see us expiate our faults by practising the opposite virtues ; humility must atone for pride, meekness for anger, charity for selfishness, penance for sensuality. Let us bravely resist our evil inclinations.

(3) Let us in this spirit look upon our temptations as occasions of victory ; henceforth they can never cause us either surprise or discouragement.

II. THE RELATIONS OF MARY WITH THE MOST HOLY TRINITY.

I. (1) The Immaculate Conception was demanded by the relations of Mary in which she was to stand with the Most Holy Trinity. Mary was chosen from among all women to be the Mother of God the Son. Could that Son of God, the Conqueror of the Devil, choose a Mother among women who had ever been the slaves of Satan? Could He permit that the enemy, whose empire He came to overthrow, should boast that he had, even for an instant, had any power over the Mother of his Conqueror? Could the living tabernacle into which He was to descend ever have been soiled by sin?

(2) Mary is the daughter of God the Father, so dearly loved as to be associated with Him in His paternity. God, indeed, is the source from which proceeded the Word made flesh; is it possible that Mary, who was chosen for such an incomparable dignity, could ever have been, even for a moment, an object of aversion to God?

(3) The ineffable love of God, which was displayed in the Incarnation of the Word, accomplished that mystery by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Is it possible that the temple in which the miracle was wrought could ever have been violated? Would not the Spirit of all holiness have watched with a jealous care over her perfect purity whom He was about to take for His chosen dwelling?

2. (1) Let us contemplate with joy these glorious privileges which lead us to believe in the Im-

maculate Conception of our dear Mother, and let us regard her with the most profound veneration.

(2) Let us keep in mind this truth : the nearer our state brings us to God, the more strictly we are bound as Christians, priests, or religious, to keep ourselves far from sin, far from everything that can defile our hearts, our souls, and our bodies. Our thoughts and aspirations should be marked by a nobility and elevation corresponding to our dignity. Is that the case with us, or are we still grovelling on the earth, weighed down by selfishness, vanity, or sensuality ? Are we too easily discouraged by trifles ? Let us always be brave and pure.

III. THE RANK OF MARY IN HEAVEN.

I. The Immaculate Conception is demanded by the rank which Mary was to have in Heaven. Mary received a grace proportioned to her dignity as Mother of God. This grace raised her above all the Saints, above all the heavenly spirits. Pious and learned doctors think that even so sublime a grace was for Mary only the beginning of many more graces.

Could she who was destined to reign over the nine choirs of Angels, who had driven the rebel Angels out of heaven, ever have been defeated by those outcasts ? Does it not seem that without original grace the Angels would have felt a sort of shame at the sight of their Queen ?

2. We who are called to associate with the Angels, to reign not over them, but with them, are bound to imitate our Mother, the Queen of Heaven.

by leading holy lives and avoiding all sin. The innocence of our lives will render less striking the contrast between the clay of which we are made and the brightness of those pure spirits.

COLLOQUY.

Let us resolve to live a life of angelic purity, and let us turn this resolution into a fervent prayer, which we will offer through the Choir of Thrones to Mary Immaculate.

*Tota pulchra es, O Maria.
Thou art all fair, O Mary.*

FOURTH DAY : UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE CHOIR OF DOMINATIONS.

THE GREATNESS OF THE PRIVILEGE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The privilege of the Immaculate Conception is at once an *exception*, an *exemption*, and a *preparation* ; and these were three reasons for Mary to value most highly this inestimable privilege, and for us to unite with our dear Mother in thanking God for His gifts.

MEDITATION.

“*Non morieris : non enim pro te, sed pro omnibus hæc lex constituta est*”—*Thou shalt not die, for this law is not made for thee, but for all others* (Esth. xv. 13).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves Mary resplendent with beauty and happiness, completely illumined by the sun of justice.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace proper to the novena.

I. THE EXCEPTION.

I. Let us consider the rarity of this exception, and the difficulties that seemed to stand in the way.

(1) *The Rarity*.—The more general a law of slavery is, the higher is the value and the price of freedom. Here we have a universal law, which extends to all the children of Adam. Jesus Christ alone, because He had no human father, escaped from the operation of this law. Let us think of the millions and millions of men who, in the most varied circumstances and conditions, succeed, and will succeed, one another upon the earth from the time of Adam to the last day. In vain we scrutinize the past, or search the present, or question the future ; every soul, as soon as it is united to the flesh derived from Adam, finds itself under the same stain of original sin.

Yet Mary escapes it, and she alone. The stain affects our nature, which is transmitted by the ordinary channels ; Mary possesses our nature, and yet she does not inherit its shame.

Others besides Mary have been virgins, humble, preserved from grave faults during the whole course of their lives, sanctified before their birth, like Jeremias and St. John Baptist ; but among the children of Adam there has never been one immaculate, sanctified from her very conception, but Mary. “ *Multæ filiæ congregaverunt divitias ; tu supergressa es universas* ”—“ Many daughters have gathered together riches ; thou hast surpassed them all ” (Prov. xxxi. 29).

When, in spite of the general prohibition, Esther

presented herself before King Assuerus, how proud and happy she must have been to hear those words fall from the lips of her royal spouse, "Thou shalt not die, for this law is not made for thee, but for all others"! and what a holy joy we may well believe thrilled through the soul of Mary when, preserved from original sin and the displeasure of God, she was received by the King of Kings with an embrace of paternal affection!

(2) *The Obstacles*.—The privilege of the Immaculate Conception required—

(a) An eternal derogation from the universal decrees. Nothing is so unchangeable as the judgment of God; nothing is so general as His laws. In order that Mary might be immaculate, it was necessary that God from all eternity should have decided to make this exception in her favour.

(b) A miracle in our nature. Our race is sinful, and it was required to produce a child without stain of sin. From a tree poisoned at the root was to come forth a branch wholly sound, a flower perfectly fresh, a fruit that should never see corruption.

(c) The establishment of a distinct order. Since the fall of Adam the universal law has been that men are born stained with sin, and are purified by the grace of Jesus Christ. The Immaculate Conception presupposes a more excellent redemption, a distinct order of preservation. And seeing that Mary is alone in that order, we may, and must, come to the conclusion that God has done as much and more for Mary than for a man for whose benefit He should create the universe.

2. (1) Let us praise God with all our hearts for

this special providence exercised in favour of our dear Mother Mary.

(2) We as Christians are already the objects of an election ; we belong to that little flock to which it has pleased God our Father to give a kingdom (St. Luke xii. 32). How many favours this title procures for us ! What shall we say if a new choice of God has called us to the priesthood, or to the practice of the evangelical counsels ? Is there one man in a thousand in possession of this happiness ? And what graces are necessary to lead us and sustain us in a path so opposed to our natural inclinations ? Has not Our Lord said : " All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given " (St. Matt. xix. 11) ?

II. THE EXEMPTION.

I. The Immaculate Conception of Mary was accompanied by a threefold immunity :

(1) Preservation from habitual sin. What a miserable state is that of the sinner, for he is separated from God, the source of all good and of all happiness ! A state of shame and degradation, for we were created in honour, and misery is always more painful when it follows upon wealth ; a state of disgrace, for sin puts us under the power of the Devil.

(2) Immunity from concupiscence—from those carnal desires which war against the soul, which the Saints endured with sighs and tears. In Mary all is calm and sweet peace.

(3) Preservation from actual sin. Sin was difficult for Mary by reason of the complete sub-

jection of all her faculties to the law of God, but it was made impossible by a special grace which seems to follow naturally from her glorious privilege.

2. Whilst we rejoice in the happiness of Mary, we must not neglect the advances that are made to us. All Christian life offers us a thousand means of putting an end to a state of sin. It may be that an inestimable grace has enabled us to preserve our baptismal innocence: the religious life gives us more complete preservation from sin, and along with it a means of making reparation which obtains for us a remission of the punishment due to our faults; and perseverance in fervour brings to many—at least, after a period of valiant struggle—a quiet, a rest, a marvellous peace, a subjection of the passions, which reconciles the natural inclinations with the supernatural elevations of the will.

Let us be deeply grateful for the favours which have been showered down upon us, and for the many means of grace which the Divine generosity has placed within our reach. Do we profit by them sufficiently to live a life of perfect purity?

III. THE PREPARATION.

I. The Immaculate Conception is a magnificent preparation for the greatest of all dignities.

(1) A magnificent preparation indeed. This privilege confers upon Mary a natural beauty, the excellence of which surpasses that of any other creature that ever was or ever will be brought into the world. From the first instant it adorned

her with a grace which eclipsed all charms of body and all the special beauty of pure spirits. It made perpetual friendship with God possible for her. Let us think of what these words mean—to *be for ever the friend of God*. How can we sufficiently value such a friendship as that ?

(2) Preparation for the greatest of dignities, for it prepared her to be the Mother of God ! There is no more sublime dignity which can be conferred upon a created being : by means of it Mary is united to her Son in an indissoluble union. See how inseparable are Jesus and Mary in the Holy Scriptures, in the figures of the Old Testament, and in the facts of the New ; in the history of the Church and in Catholic worship ; in the love and the hatred of men.

2. What useful lessons for us are contained in this glory of Mary !

(1) God offers us His grace and His friendship, not for a few months or a few years, but for ever. He wishes that they should increase continually by the care we take to preserve them.

(2) A little zeal gives us the opportunity to help in the spiritual creation of children of God. Grace confers upon us a share in that maternity which constituted the incomparable honour of the Blessed Virgin, as Christ stretching forth His hand to His disciples was able to say : “ Behold My Mother and My brethren ” (St. Matt. xii. 49).

(3) Every Christian profession, and, above all, the religious profession, tends to make our cause and our name one with the cause and the Name of Jesus.

COLLOQUY.

Who are we that we should be the objects of such generous offers? What efforts, what generosity, what sacrifices, should show our gratitude and our noble ambition to correspond to the best of our power with the call of God and our own dignity! Let us make an act of generous acceptance and self-sacrifice, and say:

*Tota pulchra es, O Maria.
Thou art all fair, O Mary.*

FIFTH DAY: UNDER THE PROTECTION OF
THE CHOIR OF PRINCIPALITIES.

THE AVE MARIA OF THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—If we compare the Gospel narrative with the verses in the third chapter of Genesis, known as the proto-evangel, the Annunciation places us in the presence of that blessed woman who had been expected ever since the fall of Adam. The holy Fathers treated the two passages as referring to the same subject, and their commentaries on the angelical salutation show that they take the words of Gabriel in an absolute sense, and include original grace in that fullness of grace which was the occasion of the Angel's congratulation. In the words that follow his salutation Gabriel implies that Mary has all the grace which is suitable to the Mother of God, for he hastens to add: "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus." We are able to find, therefore, in the angelical salutation, as we have

already found in the prophetic announcement of the Book of Genesis, a clear confirmation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

But we prefer to look at the scene of the Annunciation from another point of view. This goes more to our hearts, and we see the influence of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on the Hail Mary. Now that all the faithful know and believe firmly that Mary is immaculate, the words of the old formula have a fuller meaning. What does the Hail Mary say to our hearts which it did not say with the same clearness to our forefathers? We shall see (1) that *Mary is full of grace*; (2) that *the Lord is with her*; and (3) that *she is blessed among women* in a higher degree in virtue of her Immaculate Conception.

MEDITATION.

“*Ave, gratiâ plena, Dominus tecum: benedicta tu in mulieribus*”—*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women* (St. Luke i. 28).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the house at Nazareth. The Angel Gabriel appears to Mary, and bows before her, saying: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace proper to the novena.

I. FULL OF GRACE.

I. As he approaches the Blessed Virgin, the Angel is struck by the abundance of graces with

which she is endowed. He admires the excellence of a sanctifying grace, a union with God closer than that of the Seraphim, the perfection of the virtues which adorn all her faculties, and the abundance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are poured out upon Mary in rich profusion. "Hail!" he says, "full of the grace of Christ."

Yet without the Immaculate Conception there would have been wanting something of this fullness. Where would have been that grace of original righteousness which the Angels and Eve herself had received? Those who doubted the Immaculate Conception could not, without some reservation, have saluted Mary as full of grace. But the shadows have disappeared, and the words are addressed to Mary with the fullest meaning that our hearts could desire. Let us, then, offer to Mary our congratulations on the fullness of the grace poured out upon her.

2. Let us learn to value God's grace. God wishes to prepare for Himself a daughter dearly loved, a mother, a spouse; He desires to endow His chosen one with riches and beauty, and in all His treasures He finds nothing more precious, nothing more magnificent, than Grace. And when the Heavenly Messenger presents himself before Mary, what does he praise in her? That same grace of God.

All our worth is measured by the grace that is in us. This grace was given us at our Baptism; is it still with us? What have we done with the treasure that we once possessed? To what unworthy objects have we not sacrificed it? Henceforth let us value it above everything else, instead

of allowing our judgments, our likes and dislikes, to be influenced by outward appearances and worldly attractions. But we must be careful to keep our good resolutions with sincerity. If we value the grace of God above every other possession, we shall do all in our power to preserve it, and to make it grow in us, and thus we shall draw largely from the fountains from which that grace flows down upon us—prayer and the Sacraments, and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin.

II. THE LORD IS WITH THEE.

1. The wonders of grace which the Angel found in Mary made manifest to him a special presence of God in her and with her ; if she had not been immaculate, the commencement of her being would not have been marked by the special presence of God ; she would have begun her life with a defeat. Happily we may put such a thought far from us, and address her with the joyful salutation : “ Mother, the Lord is with thee for ever ! ”

2. Happy is the man who in all his undertakings has God on his side—the best, the most powerful helper. “ If God be for us, who can be against us ? ” And we have it in our power to enjoy this inestimable blessing. What must we do to obtain it ?

(1) We must never give to any creature so much confidence as to detract from that which we owe to God. It is right, indeed, to accept with gratitude the attentions and good offices which charity suggests, but the help of man may fail us in so many ways and for so many causes. Let us not

put our trust too absolutely in men, and, above all, let us never sacrifice any gift of God for the sake of any human or worldly consideration. "*Qui confidunt in Domino, sicut mons Sion*" (Ps. cxxiv. 1)—"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion"—immovable.

(2) We must always act as in the sight of God. Should we dare to use the help which God gives us in answer to our prayer for any other but Him alone? Let us not be discouraged if we cannot help seeing that we are far from having this exclusive confidence in God; let us pray, and place under the protection of Mary the efforts we make to arrive at true wisdom.

III. BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN.

1. The Angel Gabriel completes his praise by proclaiming Mary blessed among women. Blessed art thou in thy Divine maternity; blessed in thy perpetual virginity; blessed in thy painless child-bearing; blessed on earth and in glory! Is it possible, O Blessed Mother, that only the original grace which Eve received should be lacking in thee? Canst thou, at the first moment of thy existence, have been less blessed than Eve? It is impossible; the Incarnate Word of God watches over thee, and to all other blessings is added that first blessing which created thee in the grace of God.

2. How fruitful are the blessings of God! how barren are the praises of men! And they are not only barren of good results; but by the distractions which they cause, by the self-satisfaction

which they excite in us, they lessen the abundance of the blessings of the Most High.

Let us, then, learn not to seek for the applause of men, but rather to shun it. God will look favourably on the offering of the man of humble piety.

COLLOQUY.

Let us thank God for having taught us by the Angel that beautiful prayer, the Hail Mary. We shall love to recite it as we call to mind the high prerogative of the Immaculate Virgin.

SIXTH DAY : UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE CHOIR OF POWERS.

MARY IMMACULATE AND THE ANGELS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The subject of this meditation is furnished by the relations between Mary Immaculate and the Angels—the good Angels who venerate her on earth, and honour her as their Queen in Heaven; and the wicked Angels, who confess her power with fear and trembling.

MEDITATION.

"Spectaculum facti sumus Angelis"—We are made a spectacle to Angels (1 Cor. iv. 9).

First Prelude.—We shall think of Mary saluted by the Angel at Nazareth, and then crowned with glory in Heaven.

Second Prelude.—We shall continue to ask for the grace proper to the novena.

I. MARY IMMACULATE AND THE GOOD ANGELS ON EARTH.

1. We have just seen the sight: the Angels descend from Heaven to honour Mary, and the Immaculate Conception in all the fullness of its meaning and its importance is offered to their veneration. Ravished with delight at the spotless beauty of Mary, astonished to find so much grace in a created being, abashed in presence of the immense dignity for which this grace and this purity are but the preparation, the Archangel, messenger of Heaven, pronounces the words of the salutation. Let us endeavour to realize the respect, the admiration, the holy joy, with which every word is uttered, and let us rejoice at the honour done to our holy Mother.

2. (1) Let us admire again the beauty of the Divine plan for our restoration. In place of the disguised tempter who incites us to pride, the good Angel simply praises the work of God in Mary, and by the sincerity of his praise gives a holy example of humility. To the Angel who is envious of our happiness succeeds an Angel who co-operates in our salvation. And shall we not please God best by entering upon the path of a sincere humility? How else could we best atone for our faults?

(2) If these are the feelings of the Angel as he addresses Mary, what should I not feel, to whom Mary is the best of Mothers? With what fervour and affection should I not make the daily offering of the Rosary that she loves so well?

Let us associate ourselves with the Angel Gabriel in the meditation on the first joyful mystery.

(3) Let us consider the relations of charity which unite the Angels to men. As they gazed upon Mary, so they follow just men in their spiritual warfare and in all their works. "*Spectaculum facti sumus mundo et Angelis et hominibus*"—"We are made a spectacle to the world, and to Angels, and to men." Thus, above all, does our Guardian Angel watch over all our steps, and with what care he follows us! A little of the spirit of faith would make it so easy for us to triumph over human respect.

II. MARY IMMACULATE AND THE ANGELS OF HEAVEN.

I. Mary Immaculate is in Heaven the worthy Queen of Angels. Can we not imagine the magnificence of the entry of this Queen into her kingdom, the vast company of blessed spirits who press forward with songs of joy to welcome her? "Who is she," they cry, "that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" (Cant. vi. 9). The privilege of Mary completes their joy, takes away all shadow from their happiness, and to this greeting of the Angels Mary replies with an eternal *Magnificat*!

The glory of Mary's Assumption into Heaven surpasses our imagination. St. Stanislaus Kostka obtained by his prayers the grace to die on the day of her feast, that he might see her glory. Let the thought of it draw from us words of joyful gratitude to God, Who has so highly honoured our dear Mother,

2. What a useful lesson is given us by these Angels ! Although superior by nature, they are in no way jealous of the honours showered down upon our Mother. They love God too much ; they are conscious of having received too much from Him to be jealous of others. Let us cherish in ourselves this union of the love of God and humility ; let us silence once for all those secret envyings which trouble and poison our lives. Let us silence them, whatever be their pretext or their object—advantages of mind and body, of nature or of grace, gifts coming from man or from God.

III. MARY IMMACULATE AND THE REBEL ANGELS.

1. The Immaculate Conception provokes in the wicked Angels feelings of shame, fear, and hatred : of shame because, instead of overcoming Mary, Satan has been compelled in her to submit to his first complete defeat—he is wholly powerless to hurt her ; of fear, because he sees that the execution of the sentence passed upon him has begun ; of hatred, because pride confounded can never forgive.

2. (1) And for our part, to the confusion of the Devil, let us oppose our joyful participation in the glory of Mary ; to his fear let us oppose our perfect confidence, and our resolve to have recourse to her at all times, and particularly in temptations ; to his jealous hatred let us oppose our love, a special devotion which is the pledge of most precious blessings. Let us stir up in ourselves a holy fervour for the completion of our novena.

(2) Let us also realize more and more the triumphal character which enhances the value of holy purity. Sin is always a defeat of our will ; perfect purity is a signal victory over the Devil.

COLLOQUY.

At the close of our meditation we will unite ourselves with the Choir of Powers to praise Mary, and to implore her protection.

Regina cœli, lætare.

Queen of Heaven, rejoice.

SEVENTH DAY : UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE CHOIR OF VIRTUES.

MARY IMMACULATE AND THE HUMAN RACE.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The three last meditations of the novena will be devoted to the relations of Mary Immaculate with men, her children. We shall open this series by considering the three expressions of praise which, in the intoxication of temporal triumph, the Israelites addressed to the intrepid Judith, and which the Church in the antiphon "*Tota pulchra*" applies to the Blessed Virgin : "*Tu gloria Jerusalem, tu lætitia Israel, tu honorificentia populi nostri*"—"Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people" (Judith xv. 10). Mary Immaculate is the *glory of the Church militant*, the *joy of the Church triumphant*, the *honour of the whole Christian people*.

MEDITATION.

“Eo quod castitatem amaveris, . . . ideo et manus Domini confortavit te, et ideo eris benedicta in æternum”—*Because thou hast loved chastity, therefore also the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed for ever* (Judith xv. 11).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the whole Christian people on their knees, raising their eyes with confidence towards Heaven, as if to discover their protectress there. After having looked upon this sight for a moment, our imagination will present to us Mary herself, seated upon a splendid throne, receiving the homage of the whole heavenly Court.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace of the novena.

I. THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH MILITANT.

I. (1) Let us call to mind the story related in the Book of Judith. After having plundered the cities and laid waste the country of Syria, Holofernes, the General of the armies of the King of Assyria, besieged Bethulia, resolving to destroy the city, and to leave the inhabitants no choice but between death and slavery. Already the inhabitants, in despair, had made up their minds to surrender, when a chaste and courageous widow, strong in the help from on high, went boldly forth from the besieged city, and succeeded in reaching Holofernes, and deceiving him as to her intentions. Taking advantage of his rash confidence, Judith seized the barbarian's own sword, cut off his head,

and carried it into the city. The besieged Bethulians, encouraged by the death of the hostile commander, made a vigorous attack on the besiegers, and obtained a complete victory, which procured for them long years of peace and tranquillity. Judith, to whom the honour of this triumph was due, was received by the people with transports of joy. "Thou shalt be blest for ever," said the high-priest, and Judith sang a canticle to the Lord; and the anniversary of this victory was kept among the holy days.

(2) Let us compare the victory of Mary and the victory of Judith.

(a) The Devil is a more powerful enemy than Holofernes, and has glutted his pride with a longer series of victories. His design was like that of Holofernes: to wage war without quarter—a war ending in slavery and death. But a daughter of our race conquered him, and is destined to conquer him always; and her first victory was the Immaculate Conception.

Are not we, then, the children of that Jerusalem whose peace is assured by Mary and her Son, bound to do more than the inhabitants of Bethulia did for Judith, and salute Mary as the glory of Jerusalem?

(b) Judith did not triumph alone. The bravest of the Hebrews pursued the Assyrians with the edge of the sword until they came to the extremities of their confines, and returned laden with booty, insomuch that from the least to the greatest, all were made rich by their spoils.

In following Mary, too, the faithful gain victories, and the bravest assume the offensive, and

attack their enemies, engaging in a struggle which gains for them the place lost in Heaven by the rebel Angels, and enriches them with the spoils of victory—souls freed from the hateful yoke of Satan.

2. (1) Why should we not be of the number of those brave men? Why should we not struggle to overcome our defects, our evil inclinations? Why should we not be animated by the noble ambition to liberate other souls? In this way we shall share in the glory of Mary.

(2) But in success let us not forget her who has taught us how to fight and to conquer. Let us with holy joy celebrate the festival which every year recalls her glorious victory.

II. THE JOY OF THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT.

1. Israel—the true Israel—is the assembly of all who see God. The blessed inhabitants of Heaven will live a life of intimate charity, which will increase the personal happiness of each one by the happiness of all the others. Yet a special happiness will be felt by the Saints as they contemplate the immaculate beauty which renders their Sovereign more worthy of her royal throne, and which marks the commencement of the work to which they owe their felicity. O Mary Immaculate, thou art the joy of Israel indeed!

2. Let us take our part in this joy; and while we are on earth, let us imitate this charity. If a common lot brings us together; above all, if the call of God has united us in one community, let us rejoice in the happiness and the success of those who live with us. No other joy leaves a sweeter

memory than this ; there is no joy more pure or more worthy of a child of God.

III. THE HONOUR OF ALL THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

I. Mary Immaculate saves the honour of the Christian people in the sight of the Angels and in the sight of God.

(1) *In the Sight of the Angels.*—What are we, with our weaknesses and our impurities, that we should one day take our place in the spotless ranks of pure spirits ? The very thought of it covers us with shame and confusion. Yet we may lift our eyes, and see high above all an Immaculate Queen belonging to our own race.

(2) *In the Sight of God.*—How poor, how unworthy, are all our devotions, our thanksgivings, our prayers, our services, our love ! Is it not sad that we should give so little when we have received so much ?

But God makes up for our poverty by giving us Jesus and the Mass—that sacrifice of infinite value ; and to enrich us still more, He gives us Mary Immaculate, a pure creature, with whom, as our Mother, we may join in prayer, in adoration, and in the practice of all virtues.

2. (1) What valuable help we secure for ourselves, if only we go through Mary to Jesus and to God !

Why should we not open our hearts to our dear Mother, and confess to her how unworthy we feel to live in the company of the Angels ? Without doubting the promises of God, but to express my

wonder at His goodness, I will ask her if I am really destined to take my place there. And when I am strengthened by Mary in the teachings of faith, I will add : “ I feel deeply the need and the desire to purify myself from my past faults, and carefully to avoid all stain of sin in the future ; but, alas ! my foot slips so easily in the mire : Mother, let me place my hand in thine, to steady my steps ; and when, from the abyss of my own nothingness, I offer my poor homage to God, do thou present it, enriched with thy own, to our common God and Saviour ! ”

COLLOQUY.

Let us recall the triumph of Judith, and imagine that we are among the happy company of those who salute Mary with acclamations ; and with the Choir of Virtues let us say to her : “ Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people ! ”

EIGHTH DAY : UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE CHOIR OF CHERUBIM.

MARY IMMACULATE AND THE HUMAN RACE (continued).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Mary, the honour of the Church Militant, gives to Christians on earth motives of rejoicing, of which we will consider three in this meditation : (1) *Our common cause with Mary ;* (2) *the announcement of Jesus Christ ;* (3) *the announcement of our own joy.*

MEDITATION.

"Benedicentur in semine tuo omnes gentes terræ"—In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed (Gen. xxii. 18).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the Immaculate Virgin receiving in Heaven the homage of Angels and of men (see the preceding meditation).

Second Prelude.—Let us implore Mary to obtain for us from her Divine Son the grace proper to the novena.

I. OUR COMMON CAUSE.

1. (1) Let us see first how the Immaculate Conception was a cause of inexpressible joy to Mary herself. By her glorious privilege she obtains a complete victory over the Devil; she possesses the inestimable honour of having always enjoyed the friendship of God, the preparation for her exalted position in Heaven. Joy of her queenship, joy of her friendship with God, joy of victory, joy at all which constitutes the happiness of Heaven—the germ of all these joys is contained in the Immaculate Conception.

Let us add to all these Mary's perfect love for God, and her scrupulous regard for holy purity, and we have some feeble idea of her happiness in her Immaculate Conception.

2. We may be partakers in this joy, because we have a common cause with Mary: she is of our race; she is our benefactress, our Mother. As against the Devil and the world, the cause of Catholics is the cause of Mary. And it is specially

so at this time, for it is in our own day that Mary has been proclaimed to the whole world free from all stain of original sin. If we are religious, we shall probably find in the annals of the Society to which we belong the story of struggles, persecutions, and martyrdoms, suffered for the glory of Mary Immaculate: and in the near future, in Heaven our cause will be made more closely one with the cause of Mary.

This unselfish joy, the motive for which we find in the glory of God or the honour of the Saints, is a great consolation for the soul; it is, moreover, an act of sublime and meritorious charity. Let us endeavour to practise it frequently throughout our lives.

II. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST.

1. (1) Jesus Christ is our true joy. Whence, indeed, comes every joy that gladdens our hearts? From the hope of happiness, or its possession. Jesus Christ gives us both the one and the other. (a) He drives away our fears, and He is the sole foundation of our eternal hope. (b) Even here below, to possess Jesus is to possess the Prince of Peace, the Friend Who is faithful and almighty. He who possesses Jesus needs no other treasure.

(2) Let us with all our hearts profess our trust in our Blessed Saviour, and offer Him our hearts and our souls. But have we hitherto sufficiently realized the truth that Jesus is our all? If so, why do we look for barren and transient consolations elsewhere?

2. (1) There is joy not only in possession, but

in the hope of happiness. The predictions of the prophets thrilled the faithful people with gladness ; their arrival in Limbo comforted the souls of the just. How much more must Mary Immaculate by this dignity of hers fill the whole world with holy joy ! (a) The dawn announces the sure and speedy coming of the sun : so did the Immaculate Virgin precede by a short time the coming of her Divine Son. (b) The colours of the dawn resemble the sun, from which they are derived, and thus the beauty of Mary gives us an idea of the beauty of Jesus, Who bestows it upon her.

(2) In this little world of the human heart, Mary is often the dawn of the full day, which is Jesus known and loved ! If our souls are unhappily benumbed by the cold of spiritual death, let us pray Mary to be as the dawn for us. If we already possess Jesus, Mary can give us that full enjoyment of His presence which we admire in the Saints. Oh that a special devotion to Mary may make Jesus Christ grow in our hearts !

III. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF OUR OWN HAPPINESS.

I. That Virgin of our race, who is at the same time our Mother, is the first of all to feel the full effects of the merits of Jesus Christ. As the Apostle shows us in Jesus risen the type of our own resurrection, so we see in Mary Immaculate what we shall be one day through the merits of Jesus Christ.

What shall we be, then ? We shall be freed from the slavery of the Devil and our own pas-

sions, purified from every stain before God, possessing in God perfect happiness of the soul—a happiness which will extend to our body and all its senses.

Mary Immaculate, therefore, prefigures to us the triple happiness of liberty and victory, of purity and honour, of the eternal possession of God—happiness infinite and unending.

2. While we give ourselves up to the contemplation of this future happiness, let us strive to have a foretaste of it here on earth by triumphing over the Devil and our own passions, and by a life of innocence and union with God.

COLLOQUY.

While we rejoice with the Choir of Cherubim, we will place all our intentions and all our hopes under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin.

NINTH DAY: UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE SERAPHIM.

MARY IMMACULATE AND THE HUMAN RACE (concluded).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—A meditation in the third part of this book will show in a stronger light the special efficacy of the intercession of Mary. But in considering the relations of the Blessed Virgin with mankind, we cannot forget those which arise from our own needs and her help, and we take this opportunity to treat of that confidence in her which is indispensable to us. The *favours granted by God to the Blessed Virgin and the devotion which we profess towards her* will

be treated in the first two points, and the third will tell us what is *the nature of that confidence* which we must show towards Mary Immaculate.

MEDITATION.

"Longe est Dominus ab impiis, et orationes justorum exaudiet"—*The Lord is far from the wicked, and He will hear the prayers of the just* (Prov. xv. 29).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the Blessed Virgin, radiant and gracious, as she appeared to a simple peasant girl at Lourdes.

Second Prelude.—Let us continue to pray for the grace of the novena.

I. THE FAVOURS OF GOD AS THE MOTIVES OF OUR CONFIDENCE.

I. (1) Let us first consider the value which the providence of God gives to the intercession of the Saints, and the laws which govern it. God is infinitely generous, but He distributes His gifts with a wisdom which is equally infinite. The visible world and the world of grace vie with one another in proclaiming the miracles of His goodness. But hidden from our sight, or unnoticed in the daily course of events, these things are not revealed except to the man who believes and who gives a diligent attention to them. This necessity of a firm faith to understand and appreciate the works of His love proves to us that God intends to submit us to a serious trial on earth, in order that our crown may be awarded to us by His justice as well as by His munificence.

Generous as He has been with His past gifts, God wishes to be equally generous in future ; but while he reserves the right to distribute His precious favours as He pleases, He desires ordinarily that, by responding to His first advances, we should show ourselves willing to receive His gifts, and to employ them to the best advantage. He conceals the sight of His gifts from the man who is wanting in vigilance and faith ; He also sees the obstacles to His graces which are caused by lack of confidence and purity. Sin estranges us from God in a twofold manner—first, because it is a fault which offends God, a defilement opposed to God's holiness ; and secondly, because it causes us to distrust Him.

Often we should find ourselves, as it were, too far off from God to be enriched by His bounty if He had not ordained that the Saints should come to our aid with their faith, their innocence, and their expiations. God is glorified, His mercy extolled, His justice satisfied, the Saints display their interest in our welfare, and we reap the benefit of that harmonious union among His free and intelligent creatures that God wishes to see always preserved : all are encouraged to do something for His honour ; those who arrive first stretch out a helping hand to the weak ones who linger behind, and the timid ones rejoice in the success of the more courageous.

The power of intercession is not the same in all the Saints, and it is not extended equally to all persons and all cases. As far as we can judge, it depends on their degree of glory ; on the character of their holiness—that is to say, of the virtue

which was most conspicuous in their lives ; on the bonds which unite them to their clients, such as community of origin, or of vocation, or of worship. In fact, we may say that the nearer the Saints are to God and to ourselves, the more they can do to help us.

(2) Let us lift our eyes to Mary. God created her immaculate ; He chose her for His Mother ; He makes her our Mother. There is no obstacle which can separate so pure a creature from her Creator. Mother of God and Mother of men, she is nearer to God and nearer to us than any other creature ; no other can speak with the same confidence, none has the same right to plead our cause as if it were her own.

2. (1) Let us thank God for all the graces which He has poured out upon the Immaculate Virgin. If in His mercy He condescends to accept as done for Himself whatever we do for the least of His brethren, ought we not to consider as conferred on ourselves the blessings which He has conferred on our Mother, and of which we reap the benefit ?

(2) When we see God providing so liberally for our wants, multiplying our facilities for obtaining everything from Him, let us learn that " God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love " (2 Tim. i. 7).

II. THE MOTIVES OF CONFIDENCE FOUND IN OUR DEVOTION.

Let us understand, first, that our devotions are not to be reckoned according to their intrinsic value, but according to the value which they may

acquire through the consideration and indulgence shown by our dear Mother. Moreover, we shall here consider not so much our own personal action, as the part which we take in the collective work of the society to which we belong, and to which we give our hearty allegiance.

1. We are all the children of the Church. The Church has done much for Mary Immaculate. It has carefully guarded the casket of the tradition in which the priceless jewel of the Immaculate Conception has been preserved. It has produced holy and glorious defenders of this privilege; it has permitted and encouraged the devotion to Mary Immaculate until the moment when, in spite of the mockery and derision of infidels and heretics, it proclaimed to the whole world the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.

2. If we are members of a religious order or citizens of a country which has made a special point of honouring the high privilege of Mary, we can count as our own the efforts of our order or our country in defence of the glorious cause of our Mother.

3. The age in which we live, sad as some of its characteristics are, has yet glorified Mary Immaculate. How many books have been written, how many churches erected, how many solemn manifestations of faith and piety have been made, in honour of the Virgin conceived without sin! Let us rejoice that we live in an age which will always be remarkable in the history of devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

4. Let us add to this the little we have done in the past and the greater amount we hope to do

in the future. Our intentions, if they are simple and sincere, are in themselves devotions. Let us ask the aid of Mary in order that we may fulfil them: "*Dignare me laudare te, Virgo Sacrata*"—"Vouchsafe that I may praise thee, O Blessed Virgin."

Let us offer to Mary Immaculate the resolution to have always a lively faith in her high prerogative, an undoubting confidence in her aid, and a perfect purity, which will make us more like her.

III. THE NATURE OF OUR CONFIDENCE.

1. Our confidence should be that (1) of a child in his mother, simple and constant; (2) of a sinner who unites to a profound knowledge of his miserable condition a courageous resolution to rise and act better in the future.

2. Has this been the nature of our confidence hitherto, or has it been wavering, because we have attached too much importance to some particular favour we have desired, and have not left God to answer our prayers in His own way, and perhaps to give us something better than what we asked for, and because we have allowed a certain amount of self-satisfaction in our devotions?

COLLOQUY.

Let us lay our petitions at the feet of our Blessed Mother with confidence and love. Let us ask the Seraphim to come to our aid, and let us say again: *Tota pulchra es, O Maria*.—"Thou art all fair, O Mary."

MEDITATIONS FOR THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

FIRST EXERCISE.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—This feast is one of those which we may look upon as common to Heaven and earth, while it casts Hell into eternal confusion. This simple idea suggests the three points of the meditation : (1) *The Feast of Heaven* ; (2) *the Feast of the Church Militant* ; (3) *the confusion of Hell*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Laudem ejus annuntiabit ecclesia* ”—*The Church shall show forth His praise* (Ecclus. xxxix. 14).

First Prelude.—Let us contemplate Mary again in the glory of Heaven, radiant with the brightness of the sun, having the moon beneath her feet, and crowned with a diadem of twelve stars, as she receives the homage of all the Saints.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to derive from this beautiful feast and the honour offered to Mary the special devotion that we wish to acquire as a pledge of salvation and a way to purity and perfection.

I. THE FEAST OF HEAVEN.

I. Let us endeavour to be present in spirit at the triumph of Mary in Heaven,

(1) God the Father looks upon the Immaculate Virgin as a chosen daughter with a look of ineffable love. God the Son addresses her in the touching language of the Canticle of Canticles: "My sister, My spouse, My beloved." He loves to see in her a Mother worthy of Himself, associated with Him in His life and His work of redemption, foretold from the beginning, and saluted by the Angel in the first pages of the New Testament. The Holy Ghost admires the riches of grace with which that living temple is filled, which He has chosen to make His habitation therein.

Does not the sight of all these honours conferred upon a human creature cause us to exclaim: "O Lord, Our Lord, what is man, that Thou hast so crowned him with glory and honour?" (Ps. viii. 5, 6).

(2) The Angels, the Archangels, the nine choirs of heavenly spirits, come to offer their homage to Mary as their glorious Queen, and thank God for not having permitted in her one spot of sin. We can imagine Gabriel and the Archangels reverently repeating: "*Ave, gratiâ plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus*"—"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women."

(3) See how the Saints in their turn unite with the Angels, and how a special joy illumines those who in their lifetime have honoured and defended the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin.

But who are these others who are making their entrance into Paradise, and what is the reason of their joy? We may reasonably believe that this

day is for many souls the day of their deliverance from Purgatory.

2. (1) Let us stay a little, and forget the earth, while we feast our eyes on this scene. Let us bless God for this glory of Mary, and in order that we may one day take part in this joyous festival, let us resolve to be henceforth zealous defenders of the Immaculate Conception.

(2) On this joyous festival let us multiply our prayers and praises. Let it be a day of faith, of joy, of love, on which we shall sing our *Te Deum* and *Magnificat* of thanksgiving.

II. THE FEAST OF THE CHURCH MILITANT.

1. *The Feast.*—The Supreme Pastor of the Church on his knees invokes Mary Immaculate ; the churches are crowded with worshippers, the priests put on their richest vestments, and the devout suppliants raise their eyes with confidence to Heaven.

Mary smiles benignly upon the earth. These are her children who are assembled to do her honour, and the choicest blessings descend upon them through her hands.

2. *Our Share in the Feast.*—Let us thank Mary for her goodness ; let us be among those who are assembled to do her honour. It should be a day of confidence, and confidence shows itself in prayer. Let us pray ; for (1) we are children of Mary—though children in exile, members of a Church exposed to persecution ; (2) our obligations are so great ; (3) we are surrounded by so many imminent dangers ; (4) we are solicitous about so

many things—our own affairs, or the affairs of our friends, or fellow-citizens.

Let us ask the help of Mary by reciting the *Memorare* and the *Sub tuum præsidium*.

III. THE CONFUSION OF HELL.

I. (1) If a triumph is completed by the contrast of victory with the degradation of enemies defeated, let us think of the utter confusion of Satan and the wicked Angels: they lost the world by pride and sensuality, and a humble Virgin has obtained the victory, and after her and through her, so many children of Adam and Eve enjoy a triumph without end. What a humiliation is this for Satan and his crew!

(2) It is a day of despair and sadness for those lost souls, victims of their own passions, who under the protection of Mary might so easily have gained the victory!

2. As for ourselves, let us fight on the side of Mary, armed with these two powerful weapons, humility and self-denial; let us sing with her a song of victory, *Regina cæli, lætare*.

COLLOQUY.

Let us recall the intentions of the novena, and the many occasions on which we have been unfaithful to our resolutions; then let us offer ourselves to Mary Immaculate, to be every day her champions and defenders; and, lastly, let us continue to beg for the graces we have asked during the novena.

Let us entreat the nine choirs of Angels and the different orders of Saints to permit us to celebrate with them the privilege of Mary.

And then, with joy and gratitude, while we confess our unworthiness, let us sing *Tota pulchra*. "Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the stain of original sin is not in thee. Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people. O Mary, O Mary most prudent, Mother most clement, pray for us, intercede for us with Our Lord Jesus Christ!"

SECOND EXERCISE.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION (which is a recapitulation of the exercises of the novena).—Looking at the figure of Mary Immaculate as she appears to-day to the children of the earth, we shall see that this feast should be to us a day of *homage and congratulation*, because Mary is so great; a day of *joy and love*, because she is so good; a day of *fervent prayer*, because our wants are so many and so urgent.

MEDITATION.

"*Memores erunt nominis tui in omni generatione et generationem*"—They shall remember Thy name throughout all generations (Ps. xliv. 18).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the Immaculate Virgin under the appearance of a woman of resplendent beauty, clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet, crowned with stars, crushing the head of the serpent, and receiving the homage of Heaven and earth.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to keep devoutly the Feast of Mary Immaculate.

I. A DAY OF HOMAGE AND CONGRATULATION.

I. (1) Consider the greatness of Mary Immaculate! What an unprecedented favour is her immunity from sin! Among how many creatures does Mary find herself chosen alone to be free from the universal stain of original sin! Let us try to form an idea of the number of persons who have lived and died on the earth: we find among them brave men, men of genius, holy men, but never a man exempt from original sin. The law is made for all, Mary alone excepted.

(2) And what are the effects, the glorious consequences of such a privilege?

By it Mary is prepared to be the Mother of God the Son, the beloved daughter of God the Father, the chosen temple of God the Holy Ghost.

By it she is truly full of grace, having the Lord with her, and being blessed among women.

By it she escaped from the bondage of sin, and the fire of concupiscence can never touch her.

By it she is always victorious over the Devil; she becomes his most formidable enemy, and bears a name which is sufficient to put him to flight.

By it she merits here on earth the veneration of the Angels, and on high receives for ever the honour due to the Queen of Heaven.

(3) This privilege is contained in the first promise of a Redeemer to come; it is declared at the very beginning of the history of Creation. In that promise Mary is announced to all ages, as long as

humanity shall endure. The union between her Son and herself is as perfect as it is indissoluble : the Son and the Mother are for ever united in the Church.

2. Have we not, truly, cause to congratulate Mary, and to thank God for having so highly exalted her ? Let us cherish this sentiment of gratitude, and give expression to it frequently during the course of the day.

II. A DAY OF JOY AND LOVE.

I. What motives of holy joy this beautiful feast gives us !

(1) If we love Mary, her high privilege must gladden our hearts ; faith in that privilege calls forth the joy of love.

(2) This privilege has been recognized after long conflicts and struggles in the Church to which we belong. It confers honour on the age in which we were born, and perhaps on the country or the religious society which numbers us among its children.

(3) Mary has for us the affection of the best of mothers, and she never ceases, in virtue of this privilege, to spread her favours around her.

2. This day, then, for us should be filled with holy joy ; our hearts should dilate with confidence. Away with vain fears, and anxiety, and sadness ! Let us remember that we have a cause of joy, not gross or sensual, but a joy which forgets itself in order to exult in the holy happiness of the Mother of God. Let us express this joy in repeating Mary's own canticle, the *Magnificat*.

III. A DAY OF FERVENT PRAYER.

1. Who are we who offer Mary our love and praise? (1) Children of Mary, but in exile, and far from our Mother; (2) in danger of losing her for ever, because exposed to the attacks of that enemy over whom she has triumphed so gloriously; (3) charged with high duties, and bound to respond to the calls of God; (4) children of a persecuted Church; (5) seeing around us so much distress and misery of all kinds.

2. This day should be one of earnest, confident, continual prayer, which will lay the foundation of a lifelong devotion to the Mother of God.

COLLOQUY.

With our congratulations to Mary we will join the offer of our service: we desire to be at once followers and champions of Mary Immaculate. Let us beg our good Mother to accept us as such.

Then let us mention all the graces we wish to obtain, and while we are conscious of our unworthiness to praise her, let us ask the Saints, especially those who have been distinguished by their devotion to Mary Immaculate, and all the choirs of heavenly spirits, to join their songs of praise with ours, while we sing a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving and *Tota pulchra es, O Maria*—"Thou art all fair, O Mary."

FEAST OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO

DECEMBER 10

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—The official title, “ Translation of the Holy House of Loreto,” indicates the meaning of the solemnity of December 10. The Church commemorates in the Office of the day the famous pilgrimage of Loreto, which owes its celebrity to the special holiness which the most sublime of all mysteries conferred upon the humble dwelling of Mary. How many Saints have prayed in the basilica of the holy house ! How many heroic sacrifices have been there made, and offered to God through the Blessed Virgin ! And who can count the favours which have been obtained there by the faithful ? Benedict XIV. declares that they are innumerable, and of daily occurrence.

The feast was instituted by the Indult of November 29, 1632 ; without being universal, it is inscribed in the calendar of a large number of Churches.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Few of our readers, no doubt, have had the opportunity of visiting the sanctuary of Loreto, but many retain a pious remembrance of some other pilgrimage which they may have made. For this reason, instead of

treating the special subject which the feast offers directly for our meditation, we shall give our attention to a more general subject which it suggests to us—namely, pilgrimages in honour of the Blessed Virgin—and we shall consider (1) what is their *character* and *utility*; (2) what *sentiments* we should entertain for this kind of devotion; and (3) with what dispositions we should take part in them.

MEDITATION.

“Præoccupemus faciem ejus in confessione”—*Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving* (Ps. xciv. 2).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves some beautiful church to which we have made a pilgrimage, and the crowds of pilgrims who follow one another, and pray with such fervour.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to show towards Mary a simple, modest, fervent devotion.

I. THE NATURE AND USE OF PILGRIMAGES.

I. (1) The house of the Blessed Virgin represents the various temples and sanctuaries to which pilgrimages are commonly made. If the Mother of God is not corporally present in these holy places, it may be said that she is there in spirit, that she visits them, and dwells in them by the graces that she dispenses in them to her faithful clients.

(2) But why does Mary take delight in certain dwellings in preference to others? The selection may be explained by some benefit to ourselves.

These pilgrimages are the occasion of meritorious sacrifices, such as the hardships of travel and of lodging in strange places ; they are the cause of public manifestations which stimulate our devotion ; then, too, privations accepted, the example of others, the memory of favours granted, increase the fervour and confidence of the pilgrims' prayers. Sometimes, also, the virtues and intercession of some Saint and the piety of the inhabitants have drawn down exceptional blessings on special localities.

2. Let us thank God for having multiplied around us the pilgrimages in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Let us rejoice in the homage she receives, and beg her to continue her favours.

II. OUR FEELINGS CONCERNING PILGRIMAGES.

1. A pilgrimage is a form of devotion to which we may reasonably give our approval ; to withhold it would be to contradict the Church, and would, indeed, be a form of pride ; but our approval must be accompanied by prudence and discrimination, in order that our piety may not be attached to a place or material object in a superstitious manner, and that we may not suppose the power of the Blessed Virgin and her willingness to help us are confined to some particular neighbourhood, or depend on the use of some special form of invocation.

2. (1) It is good, then, to take part occasionally in pilgrimages, for we may be sure that we thus draw down upon ourselves more abundant graces ; but not so as to interfere with the fulfilment of

the duties of our state or profession. Let us not be troubled if poverty or obedience or other circumstances prevent us from taking part in some pilgrimage that we should wish to join. Mary is everywhere ready to hear us, and we shall please her better by doing our duties faithfully than by neglecting them to visit her sanctuaries.

(2) Let us examine the quality of our devotion by these tests. Is it a sincere and becoming devotion? Does it proceed from high motives?

III. THE GOOD DISPOSITIONS OF THE PILGRIM.

I. *Dispositions to be Avoided.*—(1) We must put aside curiosity and dissipation. To how many so-called pilgrims might we apply the words of St. John, who said of the numbers of Jews who came to Bethania: "They came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead" (St. John xii. 9).

The greatness of the end aimed at in a real pilgrimage should lead us to put aside all other thoughts. If we wish to be heard, let us show, above all, the value we attach to the grace we ask for.

(2) We must resolutely avoid all strange, foolish, or superstitious practices. The good faith of simple folk may be respected, but we must respect our religion also, and do nothing to bring it into contempt.

(3) If we are placed in authority, let us take the greatest care to forbid any demonstrations likely to bring ridicule on pilgrimages, and firmly put down all traffic, and anything which might cause

us to be suspected of interested motives. Let us remember the solemn words of the Supreme Pontiff, Pius X. : " It is vain to look for abundant blessings from Heaven if our devotion to the Most High, far from ascending in an odour of sweetness, is such as to put back into the hands of the Lord the whip with which Our Divine Redeemer drove away those who profaned His temple."

2. *Dispositions to be Encouraged.*—(1) A pilgrimage is naturally associated with piety and mortification : let us dispose our souls by perfect purity ; let us offer our prayers with fervour and recollection, and let us impose upon ourselves some real sacrifice.

(2) In making our requests, let us observe the order indicated by Our Lord : first spiritual, then temporal favours.

(3) Let us offer our devotions in a spirit of confidence.

(4) Let us make use of our authority to insure in all the ceremonies of worship decency and the observance of prescribed rules. Let everything be done for edification, and let there be nothing to cause scandal. Pilgrimages so conducted will be a fruitful means of increasing our fervour.

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask St. John Berchmans, who was so devout to Our Lady of Montaigu, St. Benedict Labre, or some other pilgrim Saint, to put into our hearts dispositions similar to those with which they accomplished their pious pilgrimages ; and let us offer to the Blessed Virgin our desire to honour her at all times and in all places.

Ave Maria.

FEAST OF THE EXPECTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

DECEMBER 18

INTRODUCTION.

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE FEAST.—Formerly no feast was allowed to be celebrated during Lent, and as on this account the Feast of the Annunciation could not be kept on March 25, the Tenth Council of Toledo (656) fixed that solemnity on December 18. When Spain returned at a later period to the Roman custom of keeping the Annunciation on March 25, December 18 still remained a day consecrated to the honour of Mary. The Office of the Season in which the Church repeats the expression of her longing expectation of the Saviour naturally drew attention to Mary's ardent desire to behold the birth of Jesus, and the perfect preparation of her heart ; thus December 18 became the Feast of the Expectation of the Blessed Virgin. Important because of the great event it commemorated, the feast acquired additional glory by the conquest of Granada from the Moors on December 18, 1499, and the baptism of a very large number of the followers of Mohammed.

After having been approved by Gregory XIII. for Spain in 1575, and introduced into the Roman States in 1725, it was extended by degrees to other

countries till the end of the eighteenth century, when it became practically universal.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall endeavour in this meditation to follow the practice of Holy Church, which unites devotion to Mary with longing for the coming of the Redeemer. We shall consider three points: (1) *Mary possesses Jesus*; (2) *Mary looks forward to the birth of Jesus*; (3) *we must live in the expectation of the Saviour*.

MEDITATION.

“Defecit in salutare tuum anima mea”—My soul hath fainted after thy salvation (Ps. cxviii. 81).

First Prelude.—Let us represent to ourselves the humble house of Nazareth.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to imitate our Mother by the fervour of our expectation and our desires for the Saviour.

I. MARY POSSESSES JESUS.

1. We seem to look with a special tenderness towards Mary in the last days of preparation, when the coming of Our Saviour draws nigh. Let us approach her full of pious reverence. She is these days truly the Ark of the Covenant, containing Him Who is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and the author of the New; she is a living tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, in which resides the God-man; as Mother of God she carries with her everywhere her Son, Whose existence is one with her own.

2. Let us offer ourselves to her service during

this period. While we gaze upon her we shall be delighted with her simple humility and avoidance of outward show; her wonderful discretion, the merit of which is shared by Joseph; we shall admire her recollection, by which she is completely absorbed in the coming Saviour; her perfect purity, which the presence of Jesus specially demands; her love, whose ardour shows itself in all her actions; the extreme care with which she avoids everything which might hurt the blessed fruit of her womb. Let us dwell on this consoling sight, repeating frequently: "*Mater admirabilis, ora pro nobis*"—"Mother most admirable, pray for us."

II. THE EXPECTATION OF THE REDEEMER.

I. Mary ardently desired the birth of Jesus.

(1) Every mother longs for the moment when she will see with her eyes the child whom God has given her; that sight will compensate for all the pains she has suffered, and she will be able to devote herself to that child, to care for it, to love it. Such is the desire which consumes the soul of Mary, but how much more intense! To see her Son! to lavish her care on Him! All her life is in that wish.

(2) Mary equally desires the coming of Jesus as Saviour. Saddened by the sight of the misfortunes of her own people, and by all she hears of the miseries of the rest of the world, she is not ignorant of the magnificent prospect revealed by the prophecies of Isaias concerning the reign of Messiah, and she prays that this reign of peace

and benevolence may soon begin, and extend its influence over the whole world.

2. We live under that reign, but how far it is from having attained its full splendour ! What darkness, what sins, what sorrows, surround us ! How earnestly we should long for the spread of the kingdom of Christ, and co-operate in bringing it about by our prayers, our alms, and our labour ! “Has not God,” a young man may ask himself, “sowed in my heart the seed of a missionary vocation ?”

Let us repeat with the Church Ps. cxxxi., *Memento Domine David* : “Remember, O Lord, the promise made to David and his seed, that they should sit upon his throne for ever, that Thou wouldst clothe his enemies with confusion ! And yet we see a lamentable spectacle of sin and error spread out before us ! Where, O Lord, is the fulfilment of those magnificent promises ? When shall Thy Son reign from sea to sea, and to the ends of the earth ?”

III. OUR EXPECTATION OF THE SAVIOUR.

1. As Christians we possess Jesus ; we have Him with us by faith, and, above all, by grace. But this possession may be strengthened, and may become more complete. Jesus grows in us as His virtues grow in our hearts and lives, and as His presence spreads more and more His peace in our souls.

In this sense we may apply to ourselves the prayer of the Church, “*Rorate cæli desuper, et nubes pluant justum*”—“Send down, ye heavens

your dew from above, and let the clouds rain down the just." And we have to reproduce in ourselves in these days the recollection, the purity, the desire, the love—all the virtues which made up Mary's magnificent preparation for the coming of the Redeemer. Let us determine seriously how we shall set to work to pass these eight days in fitting preparation for the happy Feast of Christmas.

COLLOQUY.

Let us conclude our meditation by offering our resolutions to Mary, and asking her to bless them, and to help us to receive Jesus, and keep Him with us always.

Ave Maria.

APPENDIX

NOVENA TO ACQUIRE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

FIRST DAY : THE END AND THE MEANS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION. — We shall consider (1) the *greatness of the end* aimed at ; (2) the *general means* of reaching that end ; (3) the *practices to be adopted* in view of that end.

MEDITATION.

“ Qui mane vigilant ad me invenient me ”—*They that in the morning early watch for me shall find me* (Prov. viii. 17).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the Blessed Virgin as the woman described in the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun, crowned with a diadem of stars, and having the moon under her feet.

Second Prelude.—Let us beg the grace of a fervent devotion towards the Blessed Virgin.

I. THE GREATNESS OF THE END.

What an inestimable boon it would be, how pregnant with blessings for ourselves and our neighbour, if at the end of this novena the Blessed Virgin were able to recognize us as devoted servants ; if our devotion to her were great and solid—

great in its intensity, solid in its foundation and its endurance !

1. We all desire to *save* our souls : there is no doubt about our desire, but we do not always act as if we really cared about it. Ought not this desire to lead us to attach the greatest importance to anything which may remove any danger of our being lost, or may increase our assurance of salvation ? See how in worldly matters a man increases his care and his precautions according to the importance of the interest involved. What anxiety is caused over the investment or the custody of a large sum of money ! With what concern does a man await the issue of some important business ! If life or health depended upon an operation, what value should we attach to all means of preventing a disastrous result ! Would anyone allow it to be performed on himself if he knew that a single precaution had been omitted ? Ought we not to be equally careful in matters that concern our eternal life ?

2. We all wish more or less to *sanctify* ourselves. But here we must put the question plainly whether our desire is *serious*, whether we do not rest content with a vague wish, and deceive ourselves, and so allow ourselves to be lulled into a false security. Called as we are to holiness, it is our interest to desire it in earnest. Even if our attempt is not crowned with complete success, an energetic effort is better than listless inaction.

3. Now, true and solid devotion to the Blessed Virgin gives us more than a mere chance of eternal salvation : it is a certain pledge of it. And this same devotion is a sure means of making rapid

progress in spiritual life. Such is the belief of the Saints. It has become a proverb that a child of Mary will never be lost. St. John Berchmans, when questioned just before he died as to the most powerful means he had used in his progress towards perfection, answered without hesitation that it was love and devotion to Mary. Let us be satisfied for the present with this reason, for the opinions of the Saints deserve to be considered with the greatest respect. God enlightens them in a practical manner, and in the supernatural order the light from on high makes up for conclusive proof.

II. THE GENERAL MEANS TO BE EMPLOYED.

I. Let us first of all be perfectly convinced that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is placed within our reach. This devotion is so much in conformity with the will of God and the titles we give to Mary that we can scarcely doubt that it depends only on ourselves whether we have it. Is not the Mother of God our Mother also? What is said of Wisdom we may with the Church apply to the Mother of Wisdom Incarnate: "They that in the morning early watch for me shall find me, . . . and my delights are to be with the children of men" (Prov. viii. 17, 31).

2. The general means to be employed will be: (1) humble and confident prayer; (2) attention to the study of this devotion, its nature, and its advantages; (3) fervour in the exercises of this novena. Is a generous effort of nine days too much for a result which will last for eternity?

III. THE PRACTICE TO BE ADOPTED.

1. Let us offer to Mary some special prayer which we must be careful to say every day.

2. Let us in her honour be faithful to the duties of our state. If no spiritual exercise is plainly indicated, let us choose one to be followed with particular care during the novena.

3. Let us have perfect charity towards our neighbour. Nothing will please Mary so much as to see her children love one another. Let us keep watch over our thoughts and our words, and multiply our acts of charity.

COLLOQUY.

Aided by St. John Berchmans or some other devout servant of Mary, let us beg the Blessed Virgin to accept the efforts which we propose to make in order to love and serve her better.

Ave Maria.

SECOND DAY: DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND SALVATION.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—This meditation is intended to enable us to understand better the connection between devotion to the Blessed Virgin and salvation. We shall consider (1) the *assurance of salvation* contained in devotion to the Blessed Virgin; (2) the *qualities of the devotion necessary* for that end; and (3) the *reason why* salvation follows as a result of devotion to Mary.

MEDITATION.

"Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam et hauriet salutem a Domino"—He that shall find Me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord (Prov. viii. 35).

First Prelude.—As in the previous meditation, let us kneel and fix our eyes on the splendid throne on which sits the gracious and majestic Queen of Paradise.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace of a filial devotion towards the Mother of God.

I. THE PLEDGE OF SALVATION.

I. (1) The certainty of salvation for the servants of Mary is one of those practical truths which are proved by the common belief of the faithful and the daily preaching of sacred orators. On a point of doctrine or Christian perfection, God would not permit the whole Christian people to fall into error. For centuries the people have been taught from the pulpit in towns and villages that a child of Mary cannot be lost, and the Catholic hierarchy not only permits, but encourages this teaching, which is formulated in the acts of the supreme authority, and gives rise to a confidence which cannot be disappointed.

(2) Innumerable facts tend to confirm this belief: it is true that all the stories which are told are not proved—some are certainly imaginary—and there will be others of the same kind, but there is a mass of evidence which forbids us to deny the special protection which Mary extends to those who take

refuge under her mantle. Let us remember what has been told us of the promises made to the founders of religious orders; of the wonders of the scapular and the miraculous medal; of the astonishing conversions due to some practice of devotion to Mary, which has remained when all else has been lost in spiritual shipwreck.

(3) Reason itself leads us to this conclusion. God has given to Mary the power of the Mother of God and the heart of the Mother of men. If the providential law which requires our own co-operation does not permit Mary to save us without our asking, may we not believe that she waits only for a child-like appeal, in order to exercise her unbounded influence with God in our behalf?

2. Let us thank God with all our hearts for the means of salvation which He has provided in such abundance for men of goodwill.

II. THE DEVOTION WHICH IS REQUIRED.

1. The assurance of salvation is given to the children of Mary. It is sufficient that a real devotion permits them to bear this title. But to be real, the devotion must be sincere and Christian.

(1) The devotion must be *sincere*. We must have a genuine desire to honour Mary and to show confidence in her. No special form of prayer is necessary, but the form we adopt should have some meaning, and should show our intention to come to her for help as a child to his mother.

(2) The devotion must be Christian, and, consequently, animated by that supernatural spirit which makes use of everything as a means towards

the sanctification of the soul, towards obtaining eternal life. A state of grace is not indispensable ; even a sinner may obtain through Mary the means of recovering the grace of God and reaching the haven of rest. But at least a fixed desire to return to the grace of God and a determination to do better are necessary, and it is with a view to this progress that all practices of devotion to the Blessed Virgin should be directed. Moreover, these practices help towards that progress ; they mark that beginning of goodwill which ends in a complete return to God. It is sufficient, and it is necessary, to put aside all presumption, and not to seek in devotion to the Blessed Virgin an encouragement for continuing to sin with impunity. Mary leads us to Jesus Christ ; she would never consent to receive the devotion of one who voluntarily remained widely separated from her Son.

If the essential condition is easy to fulfil, yet we cannot doubt that our devotion to Mary will more certainly and more abundantly produce those salutary effects in proportion as our piety is more fervent and more sincere, and as our hearts are purer and more full of the love of God.

2. Let us examine ourselves to see whether we have hitherto relied on devotion of the heart rather than on any exterior practice, and whether we have put far from us all thoughts of presumption. Let us in future go beyond what is absolutely necessary, and make perfect our allegiance to Mary, in order that we may reap from it more abundant fruit.

III. THE NATURE OF THIS PLEDGE.

I. (1) Devotion to Mary does not change any of the conditions of eternal salvation. We owe our salvation to the grace of God, which we obtain through the merits of Jesus Christ; and this grace requires our own co-operation. But we ask from Mary her help and her intercession, that they may bring down upon us those precious favours by means of which God knows we shall die in a state of grace. And it is because she is always ready with her intercession, that devotion to Mary is a sign and a pledge of predestination.

(2) In what sense should we attribute this assurance of salvation to our devotion to the Blessed Virgin? Will that man perish who is devoted to Jesus, to His Sacred Heart? That is impossible. How could we doubt the power or the goodness of that dear Saviour of our souls, Mary's Creator, Who has always so tenderly received sinners who turn to Him with humility?

We shall find the answer to the question if we reflect that to obtain any desired result it is not enough to have the means at our disposal; it is necessary to make use of them. Our Lord is Judge as well as Saviour; He is wounded by our sin. Is it easy for the poor sinner to approach Him with perfect trust, without fear? When we are conscious of sin, is not the most natural cry of the soul that which the mere sight of a miracle forced from St. Peter: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord"? (St. Luke v. 8). But the obstacle to our confidence disappears if we can present ourselves before Him supported by a Queen of infinite purity.

in whom is nothing but mercy and pity. That is how Mary completes the Divine plan of our redemption; thus, without detracting from the glory of her Son, she saves her children who ask for her help.

2. Let us bless God, Whose merciful providence opens out before us the way of salvation. Not content with being infinite mercy Himself, He gives us a Mother full of pity to bring back to Him His repentant children, who are filled with shame at the remembrance of their past sins.

COLLOQUY.

Let us renew our resolution to preserve always our devotion to Mary, and beg our good Mother to plead our cause with her Divine Son, and to prove once more that a child of Mary cannot be lost. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, we will say: "*Assidue ora pro nobis Jesum Filium tuum et Dominum nostrum*"—"Pray for us without ceasing to Jesus, thy Son and our Lord."

THIRD DAY: DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND PERFECTION.

In two successive points we shall see that (1) *there is no perfection without devotion to the Blessed Virgin*; and (2) *this devotion provides us with powerful means for our spiritual advancement*; and in the third we shall try to confirm this belief by the last words of Jesus on the cross.

MEDITATION.

"*In viis justitiæ ambulo, ut ditem diligentes me, et thesauros eorum repleam*"—*I walk in the*

ways of justice, that I may enrich them that love me, and may fill their treasures (Prov. viii. 20, 21).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine ourselves on Calvary, listening to Jesus, Who says to St. John, as He points out Mary to him: “Behold thy Mother” (St. John xix. 27).

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace of fervent devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

I. WITHOUT DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN THERE IS NO PERFECTION.

I. (1) In her most solemn acts, as in her daily practice, the Church inculcates devotion to Mary. A thousand times, says Bourdaloue, we have been told that it is through her that God dispenses His gifts, and that He makes us receive them from her hands. We are not in the position of those who in good faith know nothing of the Mother of God and her part in the supernatural economy, and we should be in a measure guilty of unfaithfulness if we refused to practise what the Church practises; we should be presumptuous if we thought ourselves able to dispense with what the Saints have declared to be indispensable or most useful; and unfaithfulness and presumption are incompatible with the dispositions of a soul which desires to make progress in the spiritual life.

(2) Perfection requires the choicest graces. Must we not admit that we have absolutely lost all claim to them? Henceforth, if we are to go on towards perfection, we must use all the means at our disposal, and among those means is devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

2. Let us see whether we have not, directly or indirectly, been wanting in humility or prudence in the work of our sanctification.

II. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN A SURE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

1. (1) By this devotion we ensure an all-powerful intercession, through which the sanctifying merits of our Redeemer may be applied to ourselves, and thus we make use of all the means that are placed at our disposal by Divine Providence.

(2) By it we preserve our humility ; let us be well assured of this : that all hope is vain if we are not firmly resolved to be sincerely humble.

(3) This devotion sustains our confidence, which is necessary if we desire to become Saints, and to offer generously to God all the sacrifices we must make at the very outset. It is necessary all along our way to keep up our courage when the way appears long and wearisome and monotonous, and to save us from discouragement after delays and weakness and failures.

Now, it is a matter of experience that devotion to Mary keeps up our confidence, for the memory of this Mother reminds us of all her tenderness and goodness.

2. For all these reasons we shall see that we are wise in practising this devotion as a help to keep our holy resolutions of spiritual progress. Let us repent of our past sins, and go forward, joyful in the light that comes from above, on the way that leads to the goal which is so worthy of our exertions.

III. THE DYING WORDS OF JESUS.

I. (1) From the cross Jesus entrusted His Mother to St. John, entreating him to show her the love and tenderness due from a son to his mother. Can we doubt, then, that Mary promised in return to be a Mother to this disciple who endeavours to take the place of Jesus ?

(2) St. John represents especially the souls which are scrupulously and courageously faithful to Our Blessed Lord. How few were the friends of Jesus who were found beneath the cross ! How few there are who devote themselves to the attainment of perfection, and willingly accept a life crucified to the world ! If we believe that the Gospel is written for our instruction and profit, must we not conclude from this sublime scene that Jesus says to all those who desire to distinguish themselves in His service, " Take My Mother, and adopt her as your own " ? All the words of Jesus were spoken for our highest good ; and thus the last will of Jesus recommends the devotion to His Mother as a means of perfection.

COLLOQUY.

As we imagine ourselves on Calvary, let us accept the precious legacy bequeathed to us. Mary will be ours for ever in virtue of the tender and enduring affection which we never cease to feel for her. At the same time we shall entrust to her our plans of spiritual advancement, that she may encourage and bless them

*Monstra te esse matrem.
Show thyself a mother*

FOURTH DAY: DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN OUR FEELINGS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We now approach the consideration of the important question, In what consists true devotion to the Blessed Virgin? and, first, we occupy ourselves with that part which relates to our will and our feelings, leaving for two other meditations that which concerns our words and our exterior actions and practices.

We shall see, first, that devotion dwells essentially in the *will*, and then consider the *feelings* that it arouses in us; and, lastly, inquire *how to acquire those feelings*.

MEDITATION.

“*Dilige eam, et conservabit te*”—Love her, and she shall preserve thee (Prov. iv. 6). The Church applies to the Blessed Virgin the words which in the Book of Proverbs are spoken of Wisdom.

First Prelude.—Let us imagine, as in the preceding meditation, the Blessed Virgin on her throne of glory.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for fervent and constant devotion to the Mother of God.

I. DEVOTION AND THE WILL.

I. Devotion is a disposition of the will which makes it ready and prompt in the service of God. But we serve God when we glorify Him in His works and in His Saints.

The veneration, the admiration, the confidence, that we show towards His chosen ones is acceptable

to God, for this homage brings into clearer light God's goodness and the value of the merits of His Divine Son. Our devotion to the Saints, then, must necessarily have God for its final object, while its immediate object is to honour and please them.

The incomparable privilege of Mary and the merciful intentions of God towards ourselves put devotion to the Blessed Virgin before and above all devotion to other Saints.

The seat of this devotion is the will; it is measured by the affection that we feel towards Mary, for Mary asks for our hearts.

2. It will be useful to ask ourselves whether, in our desire to please the Blessed Virgin, we take sufficient care to strengthen the essential dispositions—namely, the conviction of the intelligence and the affection of the will—of the will, be it well understood, and not of the feelings, for we cannot command our feelings. If we are really in earnest, we are led at once to exterior acts and practices of devotion.

To correct our mistakes in this matter will be to prepare the way to a solid and enduring piety.

II. THE FEELINGS WHICH THE DEVOTION INSPIRES.

I. (I) All real devotion is essentially composed of esteem and love; what other motive, apart from self-interest, could make us willing to render homage and service to anyone? The needs of our present position suggest another feeling—the feeling of confidence.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, then, includes :

(a) A profound reverence, based on a high esteem for the greatness and prerogatives of Mary. This respect demands a homage worthy of the person to whom it is directed—the Mother of God.

(b) An undoubting confidence in the goodness of Mary. No honour is so much appreciated by a mother as the influence which we attribute to her with her son, or the value that we attach to his love for her. This confidence corresponds to the share of Mary in the work of redemption ; it calls upon us to have continual recourse to her, and it is placed in the Mother of God our Saviour.

(c) A love which identifies the cause of Mary with our own, making us happy in her glory, jealous of her honour, eager to bring others to do her service ; a love which draws us to Mary as our Mother, and makes us place ourselves wholly at her disposal.

As our clear understanding of the greatness and the goodness of the Blessed Virgin and her charity towards ourselves develops our respect, our confidence, and our love, so does our devotion continually increase. And if we consider the claim that she has upon us, who can limit the growth of that devotion ?

(2) The love which identifies the cause of Mary with our own will naturally inclines us to admit the prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin, even those which are not matters of faith—not, of course, to accept them with undoubting certitude, but to admit them among the other pious beliefs in which we take delight, without exacting rigorous proofs of them. See how willing a man is to

accept praise, to believe in the existence of good qualities which partial persons attribute to him and his friends ! Does he think he is unreasonable or imprudent in so doing ? And when we are speaking of the Blessed Virgin, does not the immense dignity of her Divine maternity lead us to presume that God, Who chose her for this dignity, has refused her none of the qualities which should enhance the glory of the Mother of His only-begotten Son ?

(3) Alas for the blasphemies which are spoken and written against the Mother of God and of men ! How can we love this Mother without feeling, as we read them, a poignant sorrow which can only be consoled by the thought of the honours which Mary receives in Paradise ?

2. Let us examine our inward feelings towards Mary, and repent that we have not been hitherto so fervent as we ought to have been in her service, nor so completely penetrated with respect and confidence and love !

III. HOW TO ACQUIRE SENTIMENTS OF TRUE DEVOTION.

1. The means to be adopted are : (1) Prayer to Mary and the Saints, who were especially devoted to her : this prayer enlightens the understanding, and quickens the will. (2) Study and meditation. Let us seek to have a clear knowledge of Mary, her greatness, and her mission, proportionate to the means we have of acquiring that knowledge. We must know in order to love. Let us develop that knowledge by reflection and meditation until we

receive those exact and definite ideas which remain engraved on our minds as a constant principle of practical direction.

2. Is it not for want of nourishment that our devotion to the Mother of God has been hitherto so faint and feeble? Let us lament our past negligence, and resolve to do better in future.

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask to be able henceforth to vow to Mary a respect full of tender confidence, which shall go on increasing during our whole lives. The Saints found the secret of power and consolation in the sentiments which they entertained towards their Mother in Heaven. If we are still far from sharing them, we have all the more reason for offering to Mary, and through her to Jesus, a firm resolution to strive unremittingly to acquire the same sentiments, relying on the grace of God for success.

Ave Maria.

FIFTH DAY: DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN EXPRESSED IN WORDS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The Saints, by their eloquent praises of the Blessed Virgin, teach us, first, *the singular influence of devotion on our language*; in the second point we shall consider *the words that devotion puts into our mouths*; and in the third *the language that we must avoid*. We understand the word *language* in its widest sense, including words spoken either publicly or privately, or words written.

MEDITATION.

“In multitudine electorum habebit laudem”—*In the multitude of the elect she shall have praise* (Ecclus. xxiv. 4).

First Prelude.—Let us continue to represent the Blessed Virgin as a Queen full of sweetness and majesty.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask again for the grace of a more perfect devotion to the Blessed Virgin by a better understanding of the proper dispositions of a child of Mary.

I. THE EXAMPLE OF THE SAINTS.

I. Let us endeavour to recall the language of praise in which the chosen ones of God on earth have extolled the Blessed Virgin.

(1) What richness of expression! To manifest the feelings of their hearts they multiply their comparisons, their epithets, their similitudes; new titles of respect, new invocations succeed one another, coming from a source which seems inexhaustible. St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (died 638), and the Greek orators of the seventh century give us admirable examples of this eloquence in their paraphrases of the Hail Mary. And is it not touching to find again this inspiration of Bishops and famous Doctors of the East in a humble Saint of the West—St. John Berchmans? We know how, in spite of the reserve that was natural to him, he defied his companions to surpass him in enumerating the glories of Mary.

(2) If we are astonished at the abundance of the

expressions of praise, we wonder equally at the force of some of these. Long before St. Bernard, the Oriental Liturgy proclaimed Mary the hope and refuge of Christians. These great Saints declare that if deprived of Mary, they must have despaired, so convinced were they that to Mary they were indebted for Jesus. Read, for example, the innumerable quotations collected by St. Alphonsus in the "Glories of Mary." These outpourings of the heart are such that they have shocked, and even scandalized some souls whose Protestant education has left them in ignorance of the life and warmth of true Christianity.

(3) These panegyrists have raised their voices in all parts of the world. The West and the East alike have produced them—the lands scorched by the sun as well as the temperate climates or the regions of continual frost. They have occupied episcopal thrones and chairs of theology; they have been men of science, men of letters, or men who simply knew how to love. They speak, they preach, they write, they reason. It is impossible to estimate their number; what religious order does not count them in its annals by hundreds?

2. (1) Let us rejoice at the universal chorus of praise which ascends to Mary throughout the world and at all times, and thank God for having given such devoted servants to His Mother.

(2) Let us next learn the progress which we can make in true devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Far from our own language resembling that of the Saints, it may be that we do not thoroughly understand the force and the full meaning of their expressions. The way to the goal which they reached

stretches in front of us, till it is lost to sight ; but we must not be discouraged by this : every step we make in advance has its reward in the greater and more certain happiness it insures to us.

II. THE WORDS THAT DEVOTION DICTATES.

I. (1) Certainly words are not an unmistakable proof of devotion. May we not lie or deceive ourselves ? We may rightly say that devotion does not consist of words in this sense : that it cannot be limited to words spoken. But all feeling must be translated into outward expression ; two persons cannot love one another for long without telling one another so : “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” It would be difficult to believe in our devotion if it had not its expression in spoken language.

(2) What is that language ?

(a) It is, first of all, that which is addressed to Mary herself in congratulation, in praise, in benediction, not for the sake of telling her anything she does not know, but of pouring forth our filial love.

(b) In Divine service, it consists of panegyric, of exhortation, and doctrinal explanation. St. Alphonsus gave a rule to his children that in all their missions one sermon should be preached on devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

(c) It is the written vindication of the greatness of Mary, or the hymn sung in her honour. Let us recall to mind the pages which the great theologians of past ages have consecrated to Mary. Even laymen have devoted their talents and their knowledge to the service of the Mother of God.

Corneille wrote of the Immaculate Conception; Auguste Nicolas published doctrinal treatises in her honour.

(*d*) In the family it is the name of Mary given to the eldest daughter, and put into the mouths of all the children from their earliest infancy.

(*e*) It is the lesson of the professor, who induces his pupils to work in honour of Mary, and who loses no opportunity of instilling devotion to her into their minds.

(*f*) In private conversation, where we must take care to be natural, it means advice, opportunely given, to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin in this or that necessity, or the relation of some edifying story, or some favour granted through Mary. Let us take care always to say only what is true: false stories destroy the belief in authentic favours, and what cause can better than the cause of God and the Saints do without the help of any weapons but those of truth?

2. Do we take sufficient advantage of our circumstances, our needs, our condition, our relations, to speak to Mary and of Mary?

III. THE WORDS WHICH DEVOTION FORBIDS.

Not only our speech, but our silence may bear witness to our devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Such is the silence which willingly listens to discourse on the subject, even though it is wanting in eloquence or grace—the silence which suppresses the criticism often provoked by ignorant simplicity. It is one thing to fall into error oneself, or to correct with prudence the mistakes of others,

and another thing to condemn them in a carping spirit, which is a plain indication of want of sympathy, or personal dislike. Such, again, is the silence which leads us to avoid, not innocent pleasantries, but supercilious ridicule of practices which seem strange to us, but are adopted with perfect good faith by others: hypocrisy alone deserves our indignation.

COLLOQUY.

The Church teaches us to say, "*Dignare me laudare te, Virgo Sacrata*"—"Vouchsafe that I may praise thee, O Holy Virgin"—and elsewhere she says, "*Sancta et immaculata Virginitas, quibus te laudibus efferam, nescio*"—"O holy and Immaculate Virginity, I know not with what praises to extol thee." Let us repeat the same prayer and the same confession. We can but stammer out our praises of her whom only the heavenly spirits can worthily honour: let us beg Mary to come to our assistance, and let us offer her the resolutions which have been suggested by the points of this meditation.

Ave Maria.

SIXTH DAY: PRACTICES OF PIETY IN HONOUR OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The sentiment of devotion makes itself known in speech, and takes form in outward acts. How does the true servant of Mary appeal to his Mother?

His devotion requires a *constant recourse* to the

Blessed Virgin ; the pledge of *some special act offered every day ; acts of devotion made with care, and regulated with prudence*—these are the three points of this meditation.

MEDITATION.

“ *Qui edunt me adhuc esurient ; et qui bibunt me adhuc sitient* ”—*They that eat Me shall yet hunger : and they that drink Me shall yet thirst* (Ecclus. xxiv. 29).

First Prelude.—Once more we will kneel as suppliants before the throne of Mary in Heaven.

Second Prelude.—Let us beg the grace to offer to Mary these devotions which please her, because they come from hearts which are entirely devoted to her.

I. PERSEVERANCE IN RECOURSE TO MARY.

I. (1) The Church gives us the example of a continual invocation addressed to Mary. The name of Mary is constantly on the lips of the priest who officiates or recites the public prayers. Every time, so to speak, that Catholics honour God or Jesus Christ they call upon the Blessed Virgin to come to their aid. These practices are taught them from their infancy, and no true servant of Mary would give them up. Moreover, our necessities are never-ending : why should there be an end of our prayers for help ?

(2) We do not speak now of any long prayer in a stereotyped form, committed to memory beforehand : what we need is the child-like habit of going for help to our Mother with unceasing trust-

fullness ; the natural cry of the heart, the spontaneous outburst of confidence in the midst of our troubles—these appeals are like the breathing of a healthy man : they require neither time nor effort. “ If I am sad,” said St. John Berchmans, “ I pray, I work, I am patient ; I fly for refuge to the knees of Mary ”—“ *Sinus et gremium Beatæ Virginis.*” He showed by his example what is meant by a constant appeal to Mary in all our needs.

2. Let us carefully examine ourselves, to see whether we possess this sign of true devotion. Does it come naturally to us to have constant recourse to Mary ? Let us adopt this practice, which is so soothing and so fruitful of good.

II. THE PLEDGE OF A SPECIAL PRACTICE.

1. The servant of Mary loves to pay to his Queen the daily tribute of some special praise. And love requires care in the choice. Nowadays the daily offering is naturally suggested : in almost all cases it will be the Rosary ; every good priest and every religious recites it daily, and persons in the world endeavour to offer a part of it every day in such a manner as to say a complete Rosary at least once a week.

Neither fatigue after apostolic labours, nor the care of important affairs, nor even physical indisposition, prevented the great servants of Mary from saying their Rosary with regularity and recollection, though certainly this strict observance of their Rule required some sacrifice. But what a consolation they procured for themselves in having addressed their regular and often-repeated appeals to the Mother of God and their Mother to

pray for them “ *now and at the hour of our death* ”—*now*, that is, in all the difficulties of this present life ; *at the hour of death*, when the memory of our perseverance will bring us peace and consolation.

2. Do we practise this exercise diligently in our lives ? It is worth our while to examine ourselves on this point, to search out the causes of our failure, and to make up our minds to reform our ways.

III. VARIETY AND JUST MEASURE.

1. (1) Besides the principal daily devotion, the servant of Mary performs certain acts of piety, which he takes care to vary lest they become monotonous and wearisome. As the feasts of the Blessed Virgin draw near, various special acts are suggested, which we can make appropriate to the spirit of the festival, especially by endeavouring to imitate Mary in some one or other of the virtues recalled by the festival.

(2) We must regulate these practices with a careful regard to our occupations, our inclinations, and our needs. We may be tempted by important business, or led by neglect and forgetfulness, to do too little, and then our hearts are hardened ; or we may begin by doing too much, and then we grow weary, and so miss the end for which began the devotion. Besides, if we attempt too much, it may make us neglect other important duties.

The great thing to remember is this—that Mary will be pleased if we do not shorten our prayers because of any want of affection, if in other circumstances we should be willing to offer her more, if we are only restrained by Christian prudence from doing so.

2. Let us make a serious examination of ourselves, and draw up a programme with discretion, having regard to the time at our disposal, the advantage of devotion to Mary, and our own temperament ; let us ask for the advice of our own spiritual director ; and then let us persevere with humble and simple steadfastness as long as there is no grave or evident reason for making any change.

In making our plan, let us not forget that we have to consider those who are dependent upon us : do we give them all necessary facilities for joining sodalities of the Blessed Virgin and going to Holy Communion ? And do we incite them to devotion to Our Lady by our own speech and example ? This is the work of a true apostolate.

COLLOQUY.

Let us with unfeigned piety offer to Mary the practical resolutions which this meditation has led us to form, and ask her to accept and bless the devotion that we offer her with all our hearts.

Ave Maria.

SEVENTH DAY : THE CAUSES OF FAILURE OR WEAKNESS OF DEVOTION.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—This meditation is one of the most important of the novena. Our success depends always on our perseverance. We shall consider the causes of failure and the means of overcoming them. These causes may be described under four heads : (1) *Time and routine* ; (2) *occupations* ; (3) *bad example* ; (4) *despondency*.

MEDITATION.

"Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit"—But he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved (St. Matt. x. 22 to xxiv. 13).

First Prelude.—Mary is before us ever glorious, at the height of felicity, and ever our tender Mother.

Second Prelude.—Desirous of remaining faithful to Mary, and justly anxious for our future, we will earnestly ask Our Lord to give us the grace of holy perseverance in the service of His Mother, whom He has made our Mother also.

I. TIME AND ROUTINE.

1. People talk much of the influence of time. It would be well for us if we could resist it, for it is time which weakens and undermines our good resolutions.

Routine takes away the care we are accustomed to give to our exercises of piety, and prevents us from deriving any benefit from them: we go through them perfunctorily, and without thinking what we are doing. They soon cease to keep alive our fervour and our feelings of devotion.

2. How, then, are we to overcome these two great causes of relaxation and failure?

(1) The human remedy against the effect of time is a regular examination of our position and renewal of good resolutions. Every week—or, at least, every month—let us make a meditation, to see how we stand. Let us think of the elements of true devotion; the sentiments which it requires—respect, confidence, and love; the language which it dictates; the acts and practices which it suggests

to us. Then let us see to what extent all these are found in us, and take measures to strengthen ourselves where we find we are weak. It is most useful for every servant of Mary to put this question to himself every month, whether he has made good progress in devotion to the Mother of God. If we understand what real progress means, and realize that there is no question of constantly adding new practices, but of perfecting the principle which has suggested those we have in use, we shall see that our devotion is susceptible of infinite improvement.

(2) Instead of routine, we must have variety. Let us every year mark the feasts of Mary, the month of Mary, the day of Mary, by such devotions as our circumstances render advisable, in order that we may offer to our good Mother some special testimony of love or respect, some good work, some progress in virtue, some sacrifice. This will certainly involve some trouble ; but if a man will not take trouble, he need not flatter himself that he really loves.

II. OCCUPATIONS.

1. Affairs of business absorb and distract us : they are the thorns which grow up and choke the seed of the Word of God, and prevent it from bringing forth fruit (St. Matt. iv. 7, 18, 19). It is, then, important, but it is at the same time difficult not to become a slave to one's business and one's occupations. To that end—

(a) Let us prove our independence by throwing off in our leisure hours the preoccupations of work. Even from this point of view the hours which the

man of the world gives up to his family and the peaceful joys of the domestic hearth are not lost ; and this rest which Christian laymen find in their homes, priests and religious should endeavour to find in God. How fitting it would be to keep for God the waking hours which elapse between the occupations of the evening and the time when next morning after Mass and Holy Communion we begin the business of the day !

(b) Let us make it part of meditation, to discover the motive of our work ; let us undertake it with a worthy intention, and as we perform it, let us cherish in ourselves the spirit of faith which assigns to labour that value only which it has in the eyes of God : then our hearts will be free ; we shall escape from an anxiety which is otherwise fatal to our health, and we shall never be tempted to omit offering to God and the Blessed Virgin the acts of piety which are suitable to our condition. In a word, let us look upon our labour as sanctified by God, for Whose sake we perform it.

III. EXAMPLE.

1. The society to which we belong may not be favourable to piety. Men who are profoundly pious are the exception, and many conceal their religion under the appearance of a cold indifference. Moreover, holy aspirations are often stifled by ridicule and bad example.

2. It is, therefore, indispensable to fortify ourselves beforehand against the danger which may prove fatal to our piety by avoiding all slavish following of men, not wishing to imitate any but

those to whom the words of the Apostle may be applied : " Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ " (1 Cor. iv. 16).

IV. DESPONDENCY.

1. It is not uncommon that things, which seem at first delightful, later on become distasteful. Then, again, we seem to have said our prayers with fervour and earnestness, and we receive no grace in return. Hence results a certain disappointment, which tends to discourage us, and leads us to give up our practices of piety. In short, without knowing it, we have been looking for some palpable confirmation of our religion, and this consolation has failed us.

2. It is of the highest importance to build our spiritual life from the beginning on faith, whose property is to believe in what it sees not, and tastes not. In times of spiritual dryness, and when we seem to be entirely forsaken, let us keep our faith—that faith of which the old law as well as the new offers us such conspicuous examples. Abraham continued to believe even when he had received the order to sacrifice his son, the heir of the promises ; St. Monica went on praying for seventeen years for the conversion of her son Augustine.

COLLOQUY.

Let us express to Mary and then to Jesus our sorrow for our inconstancy and shortcomings ; let us make holy and generous resolutions of perseverance, and implore the Blessed Virgin to condescend to accept us as her perpetual servants,

Ave Maria,

EIGHTH DAY: THE FRUITS OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We do not intend to speak here of the essential fruits of salvation which true devotion procures for the soul, but to lay stress on the special helps which we derive from devotion to the Mother of God—the happy dispositions which it produces in our souls, and the comforting and strengthening results of filial piety towards Mary: (1) *Peace and confidence*; (2) *purity*; (3) *spiritual power*.

MEDITATION.

“*Fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo*”—*His fruit was sweet to my palate* (Cant. ii. 3).

First Prelude.—Let us contemplate the glorious throne of Mary, surrounded by her servants, happy to have loved and honoured her with special devotion during their lives.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to give ourselves up more and more to true devotion to the Mother of God, who is our Mother also.

I. PEACE AND CONFIDENCE.

I. True peace does not mean mere inactivity and forgetfulness; it is something positive and real, and looks at things as they are. A man is not truly at peace if he cannot see time pass and things become lost to sight without regret, if he is not secured against the dangers which threaten him, if he dare not thoroughly examine his own soul.

(1) Everything passes away, everything flies from us; but for a child of Mary everything points

to a beautiful future, which is watched over by his Mother.

(2) How many perils there are in life that we had never suspected ! But the child of Mary has a protectress who knows them all, and who covers him with the shield of her patronage.

(3) The child of Mary may search his soul without fear ; the love which he feels for her assures him of peace with God and safety.

2. All these considerations show us what a blessing is real devotion to Mary. Let us see how earnestly we desire this true peace ; let us seek to quiet our souls by perseverance in this devotion.

II. PURITY.

I. Throughout the ages Mary has been put before Christians as the model of perfect purity and the protectress of virgins. In the most ancient catacombs, by the side of the virgin who consecrates herself to God, the frescoes show us Mary as if presiding over the consecration, and encouraging it by her presence. With what force the Saints, and especially St. Alphonsus, used to recommend recourse to Mary in all temptations against purity ! The martyrs of chastity are the children of Mary. Devotion to Mary, then, is a special guarantee of purity.

2. (1) In the assaults of the enemy, furious as they may be, do we rely sufficiently on Mary's help ? To tremble too much is already to be half overcome. As we are right to distrust our own weakness, so we should be wrong to forget the help of the Queen of Virgins. Confidence in Mary per-

fects our humility ; but we must pray to her before ever the temptation comes.

(2) Christian priests, masters, confessors, let us instil devotion to Mary into those whom we wish to see protected from the contagion of the present age.

(3) On the other hand, we cannot believe in the genuineness of our devotion to Mary, if it does not implant in us a holy desire for perfect purity and a fixed resolution to make any sacrifice necessary to obtain this result.

III. POWER.

1. Devotion to Mary develops our confidence, and this enables us to obtain everything for ourselves and for others. It is believed that the Saints in Heaven address themselves to Mary in order to draw down upon their clients on earth the graces they ask for.

2. Is there any power more desirable than this power with God ? How many wants we should like to relieve ! How we should love to be specially blessed in our work for the good of our neighbour ! And how many personal necessities urge us to unceasing prayer ! Why do we hesitate any longer to put ourselves wholly at the service of Mary ? Let us reflect on all the motives which induce us to do so.

COLLOQUY.

Let us tell our Mother of all our troubles, our temptations, our needs, and beg her to come to our help, but let us ask of her, and through her

of her Divine Son, nothing so much as a deep and increasing devotion to her, and a perfect dedication to her service.

Sub tuum præsidium.

We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God !

NINTH DAY : A MODEL OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We propose in this meditation to illustrate by an example the advantage of giving oneself up entirely to the service of Mary ; we shall therefore consider (1) *the beginning* ; (2) *the steady progress* ; and (3) *the crowning* of the devotion to Mary in the young Belgian Saint, John Berchmans.

MEDITATION.

“ *Noli me reprobare a pueris tuis* ”—*Cast me not off from among thy children* (Wisdom ix. 4).

First Prelude.—Let us represent to ourselves St. John Berchmans signing his profession of faith in Mary Immaculate with his blood, or rapturously kissing her image, as he was accustomed to do, when beginning his prayers.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for grace to walk in the footsteps of this young Saint, and grow every day in devotion to the Mother of God and of men.

I. THE BEGINNING OF THE DEVOTION.

1. At the beginning of his career as servant of Mary, St. John Berchmans wrote this declaration :

“ I will never give myself any rest until I acquire a tender affection for my most sweet Mother Mary.” Let us remark the object, which is so plainly indicated : St. John is not content with any kind of devotion ; he aspires to a tender affection. And let us observe the character of his resolution: he does not say, “ I will try,” “ I should wish,” but he declares with determination, “ I will never give myself any rest.”

2. What is the cause of our sloth ? We need a definite object ; we are not sufficiently determined to do everything in order to reach it. We have only a half-formed wish, and our progress is correspondingly slow. Certainly it is God Who must do everything in the supernatural order, but He demands the co-operation of our own goodwill and of our earnest desires.

Are we ready now at least to say with St. John, “ No rest till I become a true servant of Mary ” ? In order to strengthen our resolution, let us recall all the advantages of this devotion, and let us take delight in union with God.

II. STEADY PROGRESS IN THIS DEVOTION.

1. “ If I love Mary, I am sure of my salvation and of my perseverance in the religious life, and I shall obtain from God all that I wish.” This second maxim of the young Saint shows us the secret of his constancy: the effort must be sustained by a deep and strong conviction ; vagueness and uncertainty in our intentions, and a habit of looking on the dark side of things, are destructive of all energy.

2. How shall we arrive at this happy assurance ? By perseverance in prayer, and by meditation.

Meditation has for its end not only union with God; it should also serve to give us clear and definite ideas, to dispel the clouds which darken the way to God, to Mary, and to perfection. Let us, then, pray often for light and strength; let us meditate on the greatness and goodness of Mary, and read books of sound and solid doctrine written in honour of the Mother of God.

III. THE FRUIT OF THIS DEVOTION.

I. 1. "She whom I have tried to love during my life will love me at my death." These words of the young Saint, uttered only a short time before he gave up his innocent soul to God, show us what confidence he derived at that supreme moment from his devotion to Mary.

His devotion to Mary earned for him his vocation and his sanctity. It gained for him the boon of entering Heaven a little before the Feast of the Assumption.

His biographers are unanimous in praising the calm and holy joy which distinguished him all his life in the midst of the sacrifices which he imposed upon himself for God and for Mary.

2. Let us add to this principal result the grace of a fruitful apostolate:

(1) An apostolate in his daily life: by word and example how many of his brethren did John Berchmans attract to the ways of perfection!

(2) On his death-bed priests came to ask his advice, and resolved at his bidding to profess a special devotion to the Immaculate Conception. Father John de Lugo begged him to continue in Heaven to further the interests of Mary Immacu-

late ; and thus, after the death of the Saint, the difficulties which obstructed the progress of this great cause were cleared away, and in less than a year appeared the long-expected decree of May 24, 1622, which forbade opposition to the belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

(3) Even in our own day, how many young men in the world and in monasteries have been inspired with the sentiment of tender piety towards Mary by the perusal of his Life or the celebration of his feast !

II. Let us thank God for having given to His Mother such a son as St. John Berchmans. Let us make up our minds to follow in his steps ; for what better result could we desire than peace, holiness, and apostolic zeal ?

COLLOQUY.

Let us congratulate St. John Berchmans, and ask him to obtain for us the grace to understand and practise a tender devotion to the Mother of God. Let us offer him the special resolutions of our novena, that he may watch over their faithful execution.

Then we may make an offering of the same resolutions to Mary ; and, lastly, we will beg Our Divine Lord to accept our homage as paid to Himself. Give to us, O true Son of Mary, the sentiments with which Thou didst inspire Thy chosen disciple when from Thy cross Thou didst recommend Thy Mother to his care, saying, " Son, behold thy Mother."

Ave Maria.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

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SECOND PART

MEDITATIONS FOR THE MONTH OF MARY

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

IN the meditations of the second part we shall endeavour to place before our readers the figure of the Blessed Virgin as she appears in the Gospel. The Code of the New Law gives no complete biography of Mary, but only so much of it as falls within the scope of Holy Scripture, which is to show how "the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work" (2 Tim. iii. 17). That is the part of her history which is absolutely certain, and is most intimately associated with Our Lord's mission of Redemption. To meditate on the Blessed Virgin in the Gospel is to meditate on Our Lord Himself; it is to join the Son with the Mother. We may appropriately say: "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder" (St. Matt. xix. 6). Like the Apostle, Mary sums up all the teaching of her life in these words: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. iv. 16).

We have purposely excluded from these exercises all affectation of science or erudition; it seems to us that the children of Mary will prefer simple reflections, suggested by incidents in the life of their Mother. There will be nothing to distract their attention from the principal subject: their hearts will be wholly drawn to her whom they desire to love and imitate.

EVE OF THE MONTH OF MARY.

PREPARATORY EXERCISE.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this meditation we shall consider what is the best means of pleasing our good Mother in Heaven during the month that is consecrated to her. We shall divide it into three points: (1) *The reasons for celebrating the month of Mary with fervour*; (2) *the manner in which we should set about it*; (3) *the choice which will result from our consideration*.

MEDITATION.

“Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra, tempus putationis advenit, vox turturis audita est in terra nostra”—*The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come, the voice of the turtle is heard in our land* (Cant. ii. 12).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the Blessed Virgin in the splendour of Heaven, receiving the homage of Angels and Saints, and yet bending graciously to accept the humble devotion of her children on the earth.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to keep the month of Mary perfectly.

I. WHY I KEEP THE MONTH OF MARY.

I. As a child of the Church I am bound to conform myself to its spirit, and not to despise any of the practices which the Church authorizes and recommends. All round me in the town in which

I live, the bells are ringing to invite the faithful to the opening of the month of Mary. Already the churches are decorated; an altar has been erected in each, on which is a statue of Mary, surrounded by flowers. To add to the impressiveness of the ceremonies the faithful will bring their offerings, and soon their hymns of praise will alternate with the panegyrics of the preachers. At the sight of all this, ought I not to be reminded that the living Church encourages me to celebrate the month of Mary with fervour?

2. I know that, after God and Jesus Christ, I owe everything to this incomparable Mother. I owe her the gifts common to all Christians, and many special graces; I wish to show my gratitude by celebrating the month of Mary with great devotion.

3. How many cares beset me on all sides! I have my own personal needs; I am touched by the needs of my relations, of my friends, of those who have given me their confidence, and to whom I wish to do good. I am also interested in the welfare of the Church, which is passing through such troublous times. I need the help of Mary, and wish to assure myself of this help by devoutly celebrating the month of Mary.

4. I am eager for spiritual progress, for purity, and sanctification. What a powerful aid to progress and perfection is offered to me by devotion to Mary! Yes, to become a Saint, I must imitate the Saints in celebrating the month of Mary.

II. IN WHAT WAY MUST I DO THIS ?

The fervent celebration of the month of Mary demands—

1. The offering of some *special devotion*. The month of Mary must naturally be a month of honour paid to our Mother. Where would that honour be if the sincerity of our devotion were not proved by some special offering? Faithfulness in this offering is a homage which is pleasing to Mary; it implies some little sacrifice, voluntarily made, which in itself shows affection. Let us not say, It will be enough to do good. If we say this, we fall into the error of those heretics who profess to replace all formal prayer by the simple homage of good works. This specious pretext of substituting one thing for another is really an excuse to conceal their desire to get rid of a troublesome duty. Let us, then, adopt some special exercise of piety, but with proper regard to our occupation, and taking care not to undertake more than we can accomplish. If we do little, let it be done well, and faithfully.

2. A *sacrifice*. Love is shown here below by doing what costs us something: the reality of our love for Mary should be shown in the same manner.

3. A *prayer*. We show our humility by making known our needs; in having recourse to Mary we show our confidence. Is not a humble confidence the very thing which is most pleasing to her? But we must not make temporal advantages the principal object of our supplications. Mary has better things to give, and we have better things

to receive ; and this excessive care for our temporal interests vitiates all our prayers, and renders them less likely to be heard.

4. *The correcting of some fault, or progress in some virtue* offered to Mary with the desire to be more like her. By such an intention we proclaim her excellence ; and a mother is always pleased to have children who imitate her good qualities. The desire of spiritual progress, moreover, is a mark of solid piety.

All should be undertaken and offered with simplicity and affection, without servility or negligence, with all the freedom and enthusiasm of an affectionate heart.

III. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ?

1. After a fervent prayer to the Holy Ghost, let us settle the form of our devotion, having due regard to the following considerations :

(1) It is not absolutely necessary that the four points should relate to different objects. Perhaps the best grace to ask for would be progress in some virtue that we wish to exercise in honour of Mary, and the effort required for this exercise will sometimes be the most useful of mortifications.

(2) If we have no special object in view, let us at the end of each meditation offer some acts of the virtue to which we feel drawn during our prayer : these acts will form an excellent daily offering, and will at the same time have the great advantage of recalling to us the subject of our meditation, and increasing the profit we derive from it.

(3) It will be useful to write down our programme for the month of Mary.

(4) Meditations well made may themselves constitute the daily act of special devotion. If, however, we are already accustomed to meditate daily, then this special devotion must consist in some additional exercise, which, if it be not too burdensome, will be a guarantee that our daily duty has been well performed.

COLLOQUY.

Let us piously and affectionately offer our resolutions to the Blessed Virgin under the patronage of some Saint known for his devotion to the Mother of God ; and let us ask Mary to bless the efforts of our good-will, which, if weak, is at least sincere.

FIRST SECTION

MARY AND THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

FIRST DAY : THE ANGELIC SALUTATION.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The Gospel story of the Blessed Virgin commences with her interview with the Archangel Gabriel, who approaches her with reverence. The homage of praise conveyed in his salutation, and the impression which it produces on the Blessed Virgin, lead us, naturally, to think on the praise which we ourselves have ordinarily to give or receive, in order that we may model our conduct on that of the Archangel and

the Mother of God. The meditation will comprise three points: (1) *Human compliments*; (2) *the Angel's praise*; (3) *the trouble of Mary*.

MEDITATION.

"*Et ingressus Angelus ad eam dixit, ave gratia plena*"—*And the Angel, having come in, said unto her, Hail, full of grace* (St. Luke i. 28).

First Prelude.—Let us remember how, when the days were accomplished, God sent an Archangel to the Blessed Virgin to inform her of the designs of Infinite Goodness towards her, and to propose to her that she should become the Mother of the Word made flesh. The Archangel approached and saluted her.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the little town of Nazareth and the humble dwelling in which the interview between Mary and the Archangel took place.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to be instructed and edified in contemplating the virtues of our Mother.

I. HUMAN COMPLIMENTS.

We shall consider, first, the *purpose* of human compliments; next, their *vanity*; and lastly, the *conclusion* we should draw from a consideration of these two points.

I. *Their Object.*—The approval and praise of our fellow-men are by no means without value: they encourage our efforts, they compensate for our sacrifices, and they are the signs of a friendly sympathy which brings men nearer together; but

to fulfil this purpose, they must be sincere, and they must be deserved.

II. *Their Vanity*.—Human compliments, which have their use, like other things in this world, partake of the vanity which characterizes all human things ; we must beware, then, of valuing them so highly as not to be able to do without them. Let us see how the vanity of human praise shows itself.

I. How often are these compliments made worthless by their intention or by their object ! We may have sincere praise, or we may have a lying, hypocritical praise which, behind the back of the person spoken of, is turned into sarcasm and ridicule ; fulsome praise which is evidently dictated by self-interest ; and the praise which is made worthless by the incompetence of the person who bestows it.

This is the explanation of the shame and confusion which are caused by indiscriminate praise to holy and learned persons : the former are so penetrated with a sense of the Divine Majesty that they see too well what is wanting in themselves ; the latter are too conscious of their own ignorance.

How often is praise bestowed without any reason ! Deceitful appearances are accepted as real merit, and vice and sensuality are lauded to the skies. If we think of some of the persons who have had statues erected in their honour, we shall learn not to value too highly a distinction which is shared by many who are vile and contemptible.

Human praise naturally follows success, and this often is the result of mere chance.

Man praises a particular quality, and loses sight of the defects which accompany it ; and the quality which is the subject of praise is very often some

mere external grace which is not of the slightest importance.

2. Even when human praise is free from these defects, it is but a poor thing, so weak and unsatisfying, and it lasts such a short time. The man who bestows it changes his mind, or he forgets, or passes away.

III. *Conclusion*.—What, then, should we do? Since in the designs of Providence the praise and approbation of men may be beneficial to individuals as well as to the common interests of society, we must not altogether despise them; but we must learn how to bestow praise and to receive it with discretion.

1. In bestowing praise let us be straightforward, sincere, and just.

Straightforward—that is to say, guided by a frank and honest intention. Let us never be guilty of praising a man to his face and speaking ill of him behind his back.

Sincere.—If a commonplace phrase, a simple word of commendation, may be only a harmless politeness, which can deceive none but an inordinately vain person, any strong language of praise should only be used to express our honest opinion.

Just—that is, we should not, like the envious, grudge our praise where it is due, nor exaggerate, like the flatterer, but express our opinion fairly, without being prodigal of our approbation.

2. (1) Let us avoid begging for praise, and scorn the petty devices which vanity suggests, in order to attract attention and gain some flattering compliment.

(2) Let us receive praise with modesty, and with

the gratitude which any mark of sympathy demands. But we must take care not to attach too much importance to it, and only value it for the influence which it may obtain for us in order to serve the true interests of our neighbour. We cannot return thanks in a worthier manner, or make a more judicious use of the gift.

(3) Let us learn not to be troubled if we see human praise pass by us or over our heads.

II. THE ANGEL'S PRAISE.

1. How far the praise of the Angel surpasses all human compliments! From whom does that praise come? From Him Who is infinite wisdom and knowledge, of Whom the Angel is only the messenger. What does he praise? The highest and most precious dignity of God's creature, with which she is endowed by supernatural grace from on high. "*Ave, gratia plena*"—"Hail, full of grace." How long will that grace last? For all eternity. The Angels in Heaven are still celebrating that fullness of grace before which Gabriel bowed in the humble dwelling of Nazareth.

2. Let us remember that the Church militant offers a spectacle which delights the Angels of Heaven. "*Spectaculum facti sumus Angelis*"—"We are made a spectacle to Angels." Let us remember that our Guardian Angel is the benevolent witness of all our good actions, and if we are worthy to receive the praise of the inhabitants of Heaven, we need not care if men pass us by or misunderstand us.

But in order to deserve the praise of the Angels

we must cherish and develop the grace which we received at our Baptism, lost, perhaps, for a time by our own foolishness, but recovered by penance. Let us repent of the sin which separated us from grace, and deprived us of the right to the praise of Heaven, and let us in future exercise a jealous care to keep that grace in our hearts.

III. THE TROUBLE OF MARY.

“Mary was troubled,” says St. Luke, but he adds, “at the saying of the Angel.” It was not at the sight of the heavenly Messenger that Mary felt any anxiety; her trouble came from her humility; the occasion of it was the saying which she had just heard. Yet we must clearly understand what this means. Are we to suppose that the Mother of God in her maidenly modesty was afraid of being made vain by the smallest word of praise? She was troubled through her humility, but why? Because, living, as she did, retired, little in her own eyes, she thought only of the fact that an Angel had saluted her, and in language of such high praise. She thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be, what it was leading to, and in what manner God wished her to receive it. The messenger inspired her with confidence; but was it possible, she asked, that such a message should come to her? This uncertainty, this doubt in a soul desirous to please her Lord in all things, was, we may believe, what caused Mary to be troubled at the words of the Angel.

Let us have no anxiety, no care, but only to please God.

COLLOQUY.

Let us earnestly pray our dear Mother to get us the grace always to do what is pleasing to God.

Ave Maria.

SECOND DAY: THE CONVERSATION
BETWEEN MARY AND THE ARCHANGEL.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The questions of Mary and the explanations of the Angel show us how to recognize the spirit that is of God. “*Probate spiritus si sunt a Deo*,” says St. Paul—“Try the spirits if they be of God” (1 Cor. iv. 1). The three points of our meditation will be: (1) *The first explanation of the Archangel*; (2) *the Blessed Virgin’s question* which followed it; and (3) *Gabriel’s reply*.

MEDITATION.

“*Ne timeas, Maria, invenisti enim gratiam apud Deum*”—*Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God* (St. Luke i. 30).

First Prelude.—At the sight of the trouble of the Blessed Virgin the Archangel Gabriel hastens to reassure her, and announces the great designs of God upon her. “How shall this be done?” Mary insists, so to speak, on the fullest explanation. The Archangel gives it. The omnipotence of God, which has just blessed in such a wonderful manner the union of Zacharias and Elizabeth, will be able to accomplish the purposes of His infinite wisdom.

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine the humble scene of the interview which decided our fate,

Third Prelude.—Let us implore the grace to know the Blessed Virgin better, and to imitate her supernatural prudence.

I. THE FIRST EXPLANATION OF THE ARCHANGEL.

I. (1) Seeing Mary so troubled, the Angel was bound to reassure her, and to explain the meaning of his first salutation: "Fear not, Mary." This exhortation to peace, coming from God, is enough to produce an interior tranquillity, the surest sign of the presence of the good spirit.

(2) The Angel adds new congratulations to his first salutation. But on what does he congratulate Mary? On the grace which she has found with God, and on the greatness of the Son which that grace will enable her to bring into the world.

2. The only true greatness is to find grace with God, and to see His designs accomplished in us; let us not value or desire any other.

II. MARY'S QUESTION.

I. Mary is at once reassured by these comforting words of the Archangel, which are uttered, not for the exaltation of a creature, but for the glory of God. But how are such marvels to be accomplished? Mary has the right to know.* The precise indication of the manner of this accomplishment, if it harmonizes with the other designs of God upon her, and especially with her vow of perpetual virginity, will complete the first announcement of the Archangel.

Mary asks for a full explanation, and thus gives us a beautiful example of humility.

Far from accepting without consideration a plan of inconceivable greatness, Mary examines it calmly, as if she were not personally concerned in it. How rare is such wisdom among men! Most men to whom a chance of personal exaltation is offered rush at it with a temerity which is often paid for with bitter tears, and a poignant regret which comes too late. Like pleasure, the splendour of rank is far from being synonymous with real happiness.

2. Let us follow Mary's example, and have sufficient strength and self-restraint to refuse to accept any outward honour without making a careful and serious examination which shall enlighten us on the designs of Providence.

III. THE ARCHANGEL'S REPLY.

Let us study, in the answer of Gabriel, the characteristics of God's action.

1. "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.*" Far from impairing the virginal innocence which Mary had vowed to God, the action of the Holy Spirit is to enhance and preserve its purity for all eternity. This constancy in the pursuit of a praiseworthy object is a sure sign of the Spirit of God.

2. Not content with replying to the modest and natural question of the Blessed Virgin, the Angel confirms what he has said by revealing a miracle which has been already accomplished, and which can easily be verified. "*And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old*

age." John the Baptist is the forerunner of Jesus ; his birth will precede that of the Saviour. A miraculous birth presages one still more marvelous, and the knowledge of this double miracle suggests the following words of the Archangel : "*Because no word shall be impossible with God.*"

3. The Angel has accomplished his mission ; in all he has said, in all he has proposed from beginning to end, all is grand, all is holy, all inspires confidence, and all tends to the glory of God. By these signs we may recognize the inspirations of God. We may be deceived by appearances at first, but we must in all our undertakings see that the means suggested to use are pure, and that our undertakings themselves are directed to some lofty end.

(1) We see in the account of this interview that God never refuses His light to one who sincerely desires it.

(2) Divine communications are never without a purpose : if the Angel appeared to Zachary and to Mary, it was not merely to give them pleasure, but to contribute to the great work of the redemption of mankind.

(3) To all these lessons let us add that of an unwavering confidence in an Almighty and loving Father.

COLLOQUY.

This sentiment will animate us in our concluding prayer : Let us bless God for His constant care of us, and implore of Him the grace always to recognize it and to correspond with it.

Ave Maria.

THIRD DAY : THE CONSENT OF MARY.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall consider the offer made by God, and Mary's acceptance of it, in three points : (1) *The consent required* ; (2) *the consent given* ; (3) *the effects of this consent*.

MEDITATION.

“Dixit autem Maria : Ecce ancilla Domini ; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum”—And Mary said, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it done to me according to Thy word* (St. Luke i. 38).

First Prelude.—Having assured herself of the Divine mission of the Archangel Gabriel, Mary calls down the Word of God into her virginal breast.

Second Prelude.—Let us fix our thoughts on the humble dwelling where these great events took place.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace to know our Mother better, to love her more, and to imitate her by a prudent and intense zeal for the salvation of souls.

I. THE CONSENT REQUIRED.

I. What a marvellous disposition of Providence is this, that God, Who can do everything by Himself, nevertheless requires the co-operation of man in all which concerns our salvation ! What an honour to the free-will of man ; but, on the other hand, what a profound and awful mystery ! If it is terrible to have the responsibility of our own salvation, what must it be to be answerable for

the salvation of others ? Not only does the salvation of adult persons without exception require their own personal co-operation with the grace from on high, but the salvation of others depends upon the men whom God has made the instruments of His grace—the willing instruments, for God has not constrained them. How emphatically St. Paul brings out this truth : “ Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ ; and how shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard ? ” (Rom. x. 17, 14). Faith requires hearing ; hearing requires a preacher ; and that preacher is free.

See what an awful power is possessed by parents, masters, companions, to ruin or to save the souls of others.

2. From this fact two things follow :

(1) “ *Heaven helps those who help themselves.* ” This proverb applies to our own spiritual life. Moral healing and holiness will not come to us without our own will. This goodwill is certainly a great grace in itself, but it is also the free correspondence with a preceding grace.

(2) We are bound to labour for the salvation of our brethren. Has our influence on others always been good and sanctifying, leading them on to better things ? Has it always been as energetic as it might have been ? Behold, now is the acceptable time ; let us resolve to labour unceasingly for the salvation of souls. Let us meditate on these words of St. Paul : “ But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls ; although loving you more, I be loved less ” (2 Cor. xii. 15).

II. THE CONSENT GIVEN.

How does Mary give her consent ?

I. 1. *Simply*, without affectation or timidity ; full of confidence in God, she accepts the most sublime mission that can be imagined.

2. But she accepts this duty *as the handmaid of the Lord*. “ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it done to me according to Thy Word.” Although the dignity of Mother of God surpasses our understanding, in Mary’s eyes it is but a form of the service of God. Here is that marvellous humility, the principal mark of that city of God which St. Augustine describes as founded on the love of God and contempt of ourselves.

II. Oh, if we knew how to devote to the service of God all our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures—in a word, all the events of our life—how great would be our merit and our happiness !

III. THE EFFECTS OF THE CONSENT.

I. Mary has said “ Yes.” That simple word was enough ; and God, Who is accustomed to do great things without outward preparations, accomplishes His work, and the Archangel, who but an instant before was saluting a pure virgin, must now worship the God-man. “ *Et Verbum caro factum est* ”—“ The Word was made flesh.”

II. 1. Let us bless God, but let us also thank Mary, who by her consent becomes the Queen of Apostles, and the greatest benefactress of the human race.

Yet she is so only by the grace of God, to Whom all the glory must be given.

2. Let us think of the manifold opportunities of doing good which are offered us, with an ardent desire to make use of them. The good of souls ! There is no object more worthy of our exertions ; there is no result more sublime to attain to, no fruit more sweet to gather. But let us remember that it is only by the grace of God that we are enabled to do any good or to be real benefactors of our fellow-men.

COLLOQUY.

Let us pray to Mary that we may not be of the number of those “ of whom there is no memorial, who have perished as if they had never been,” because they have passed their time uselessly on earth ; but that we may be among those “ men of mercy whose godly deeds have not failed ” (Ecclus. xliv. 9, 10).

Ave Maria.

SECOND SECTION

THE VISITATION OF MARY

FOURTH DAY : THE ENTHUSIASM OF MARY.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The animation which fills the story of the Visitation is too little remarked, and it will be well to draw attention to it. Too often we think of the Saints as living a dull and

formal life, without any spirit or vigour. We shall now consider (1) *the enthusiasm of Mary*; (2) *its effects*; (3) *its sublime expression in the Magnificat*.

MEDITATION.

“*Exsurgens autem Maria in diebus illis, abiit in montana cum festinatione*”—*And Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill-country with haste* (St. Luke i. 39).

First Prelude.—After the departure of the Angel, Mary was divinely moved to go and visit that pious relation whose happiness had served as a presage and confirmation of her own. Scarcely had Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, when she felt her child leap in her womb. Filled with the Holy Ghost, she congratulated the Mother of God, who replied with her canticle of thanksgiving, the *Magnificat*.

Second Prelude.—Let us glance at the uneven road leading from Nazareth to Hebron, and stop at the little town of Hebron and the house of Zachary.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray for the grace to understand and share the holy zeal of our Mother.

I. THE ENTHUSIASM OF MARY.

I. “Mary, rising up, went into the hill-country with haste.” Does not this eagerness, of which the Evangelist speaks, show the holy fervour of our Mother’s soul?

The first effect of the message of the Angel was to strike Mary with consternation, to overwhelm

her with the thought of her own insignificance as a mere creature ; the second was to enrapture her with the marvels of the goodness and mercy of her Creator. Mary fixes her thoughts on the work which God condescends to accomplish in her. Her heart is bursting with joy and gratitude and love, and she feels an irresistible impulse to cross the mountains to visit that other highly-favoured woman, with whom she may exchange confidences and unite in thanksgiving.

Is not this a beautiful spectacle ? We find in her the same emotions that we feel in ourselves, but sanctified in her by their object and her intention. Perfect holiness in man does not destroy life, or energy, or joy, or love ; it elevates and ennobles them all, for perfect holiness is holiness of body and soul. It is not the death of any of our faculties, but the life of all.

II. 1. And have not we ourselves cause to be enthusiastic sometimes ? “ There is no creature under Heaven,” says the “ Imitation of Christ,” “ so beloved as the devout soul to whom God cometh.” Have we listened as we ought to the voice of Nature, the voice of all things, great and small, which invite us to praise God ? Have we found nothing but stern duty in the truths of faith ? Have we found there the loving care of our Heavenly Father ? Has the history of our own lives sufficiently revealed to us the attributes of God’s ineffable Providence, which made the Psalmist sing, “ *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo* ” ?—“ The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever ” (Ps. lxxxviii. 1).

2. How much love there is, and pure love, too,

in holy enthusiasm! What help should we find there to strengthen our confidence, and to keep our eyes fixed in holy desire on an ideal which raises us above the commonplace of human occupations and the prosaic dullness of daily events! If only the priest would listen to the Church! How often does she put into his mouth hymns of praise to God! Think of the *Gloria* in the Mass, the *Te Deum*, *Benedictus*, and *Magnificat* of the Divine Office, all the Psalms of *Lauds*, and the *Confitemini* in the Prime of Sunday.

II. ITS EFFECTS ON ST. JOHN AND ST. ELIZABETH.

I. Full of grace in her person, Mary is equally so in all her words and actions. As soon as she arrives at the house of Elizabeth she salutes her, and her salutation fills her cousin with a holy joy. Elizabeth's child, John the Baptist, leaps in her womb, and she herself is filled with the Holy Ghost. The pleasure of the visit of the Mother of God, added to that of her own maternity, communicates to Elizabeth some of the enthusiasm of Mary. "Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Let us share the truly heavenly joy of these two mothers, who bear within them the hope of salvation for so many. Assuredly this joy is not for themselves alone, but "to all the people" (St. Luke ii. 10).

II. If we choose to reflect on our own conduct, let us ask ourselves whether our conversation is such as to encourage others and elevate their thoughts, or if its only effect is to discourage and

depress them. To cheer others and stimulate their confidence is the true work of an Apostle. To make others sad and gloomy is an unchristian office, and comes from a desire to satisfy our own secret vanity.

III. THE EXPRESSION OF ENTHUSIASM IN THE MAGNIFICAT.

I. The canticle of the Blessed Virgin will form the subject of special meditations. At present we will content ourselves with observing that this song of glorified humility is full of tender feeling, and is wholly directed to the glory of God. Mary sees only two things—her own insignificance, and the bountiful mercy of God. There is no room in her for vanity, and the sentiment of her song is so pure and so true that after two thousand years Christian inspiration has found no more fitting language to express the praise of God.

II. Let us, too, sing our *Magnificat*; and let humble gratitude drive from our hearts both cowardice and presumption.

COLLOQUY.

Let us earnestly ask Mary to obtain for us the grace that our humble hope may enable us to realize always in our lives the promise of the prophet: "They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. xl. 31).

Ave Maria.

FIFTH DAY : THE CONGRATULATIONS OF ELIZABETH.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The congratulations which St. Elizabeth addresses to the Blessed Virgin suggest three points for our meditation : (1) *The joy of believing ;* (2) *the loss caused by the want of a living faith ;* (3) *the Word of God, which is the object of our faith.*

MEDITATION.

“ Beata quæ credidisti, quoniam perficientur ea quæ dicta sunt tibi a Domino ”—*Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord* (St. Luke i. 45).

First Prelude.—The Archangel Gabriel, in saluting Mary, had done homage to the abundant graces with which she was already adorned, and which were to be crowned by that exalted dignity which he came to announce to her. After the salutation of the Angel comes the greeting of Elizabeth, who congratulates her on her perfect faith.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the house of Zachary and Elizabeth, in which the latter received the Blessed Virgin.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray that, like our Mother, we may all our lives feel the consolations of faith.

I. THE JOY OF BELIEVING.

I. I. *“ Blessed art thou who hast believed ! ”* By the light of the Holy Ghost St. Elizabeth discovers

the incomparable privilege and dignity of the humble young maiden who has just saluted her. In an ecstasy of delight she asks, "Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" and then she puts another question: "Whence comes to Mary the honour of such a choice?" The Holy Spirit reveals to her the reason in the faith of the Blessed Virgin. "Blessed art thou who hast believed!" If it were not for thy faith, how much thou wouldst have lost! Thanks to thy faith, how much thou hast received!

These same words of blessing will be found on the lips of the Son of Mary, but addressed by anticipation to all who believe. "*Beati qui non viderunt, et crediderunt*"—"Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed" (St. John xx. 29).

2. Why should those who believe be called blessed? First of all, no doubt, because their generous acceptance of the mysteries of the faith prepares for them the brightness of an eternal vision; but already we may call them blessed, because faith gives rest to their souls, and offers them an object worthy of their belief.

In this life man has equal need of rest and action. His hands must work, and he must face his work with courage and confidence. Weariness and discontent are the two great evils of the mind; the two greatest blessings are peace of mind and the consciousness of being useful. Look at the child who will give up even his games to play the part of an important personage. Faith, and faith only, can give to the mind an object worthy of the exercise of its faculties; for, when faith fails,

there is nothing to take its place but doubt and uncertainty. Believe, and you know where you are, and whither you are going ; cease to believe, and you know neither why you exist nor what you are working for.

A man who has lost his faith is like a disabled ship in the hands of a pilot who knows neither his course nor the port of his destination. Such a man may seek to forget his troubles in the pursuit of pleasure, but he can never be truly happy.

II. The joy of believing ! What a blessing it is to have a deep feeling of the truth of religion ! We may not be able to prove what we believe, but that feeling helps us to value our religion, to keep it with care, and to accept the proofs when they are offered us. We do not willingly throw away a treasure, and we easily accept what we know ought to lead us to happiness.

And is not the joy of believing in itself a sort of confirmation of our belief ? Does it not at least establish a reasonable presumption against unbelief ? Does not the harmony of Nature require that truth and goodness and happiness shall be inseparable ? How terrible, how unnatural it would be if we could only save our lives by giving up our faith !

II. THE MISERY OF BEING WITHOUT A LIVELY FAITH.

I. In order to enjoy to the full the joy of believing, it is not enough to possess only so much faith as is necessary for salvation. While the wife of Zachary was congratulating the Blessed Virgin,

did she not contrast the happiness of her cousin with the distress which her own husband was suffering through his want of faith? A great blessing had been vouchsafed to the house of Zachary, but his unbelief had caused him to be deprived of speech, and so of the full power to rejoice at the blessing.

II. How often does the want of a living faith keep a man in a state of painful silence! As Christians, and much more as priests or religious, if such be our vocation, we are surrounded on all sides by the mercies of God. The sight of these blessings filled the Saints with consolation and joy and confidence; but, alas! we see priests and religious sad and mournful and discouraged. The Masses they celebrate, the good they are able to do, the evil they prevent, no longer make any impression upon their hearts, and seem to say nothing to them. They are more ready to murmur and complain than to burst out in hymns of praise. Are not this gloomy indifference and this moral lassitude caused by the lack of a living faith? Let us take care often to recall the memory of benefits received in order that a more genuine gratitude may produce in us a livelier faith.

III. THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH; THE PROMISES OF GOD.

“Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.” Elizabeth congratulates the Blessed Virgin, not on her faith in general, but on the special confidence with which she had believed

that the wonders which had been announced would be accomplished in her.

I. There is nothing so important as that faith in God's promises, on which all our hopes are founded.

1. The sinner hears in the bottom of his heart a voice which promises him pardon and mercy if he will but repent. If he believes and obeys this warning, he soon receives from the most loving of fathers the same affectionate welcome which was given to the prodigal son returning to his father's home.

2. The man who is the slave of passions and bad habits of which he is really ashamed hears an interior voice which reminds him of the virtue of prayer and the power of God's help. If he believes, if he listens, he will say with a new meaning these decisive words, "*I can, and I will,*" and at once his chains are broken, and he is saved.

3. How many young men hear this word in their inmost hearts: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor; and come, follow Me." If they believe, if they obey the call, they set before them the noblest of ends; they have the happiness of giving themselves wholly to God; they become the Levites of the Lord, the devoted soldiers of every good cause.

4. And among priests and religious, is there not a constant call to spiritual progress, to perfection, to the highest virtue? If they give ear to that call, they will become Saints.

Let us bear in mind this sublime truth: the Word of God is accomplished in him who believes it; and God's magnificent promises are fully realized.

COLLOQUY.

Let us congratulate Mary on her faith, and ask for grace to show a like faith ourselves.

Ave Maria.

SIXTH DAY : THE MAGNIFICAT

(FIRST PART).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—This incomparable hymn of praise, uttered by the Mother of God, may be divided into two parts : in the first part Mary sings of the designs of God upon herself ; in the second of the way in which God pours His blessings on the world in general. The present meditation will be on the first part, and will touch on three points : (1) *The sentiments of the Blessed Virgin ;* (2) *their source ;* (3) *the Divine perfections to which Mary pays homage.*

MEDITATION.

“ *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* ”—*My soul doth magnify the Lord* (St. Luke i. 46).

First Prelude.—Let us think of the first verses of the *Magnificat* : “ My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid ; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me ; and holy is His Name. And His mercy is from generation unto generation, to them that fear Him.”

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the

room in the house of Zachary in which these solemn words of Our Blessed Lady were spoken.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly beg the grace to live as our blessed Mother lived, full of gratitude for God's goodness towards us.

I. THE SENTIMENTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

I. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." What fervent love there is in these words! And can we wonder? Scarcely had the choice of God been fully made known, when Mary's soul was filled with gratitude, which quickened the flames of the Divine love that already consumed it. Reflection had only produced an increase of that sentiment of gratitude. Mary had restrained herself before the Angel, and in her care to keep secret the Divine message, she had maintained silence before her friends and relations at Nazareth. Her virginal modesty had imposed upon her a complete reticence during her journey towards Hebron, but when she presented herself before her pious cousin, whom she found already aware of the wonders that had been accomplished in her, there was no longer any reason to restrain the sentiment which insisted on outward expression; and so there fell from her lips those accents of enthusiastic gratitude, like the waves of a river which overflows its banks.

Anna sang when God gave Samuel to her; but Jesus is much more than Samuel, and how could Mary help singing? Moses sang when the children of Israel escaped from the army of

Pharaoh and crossed the Red Sea ; and Mary could not but rejoice at the deliverance of the whole world from the power of the Devil, and the opening of Heaven to mankind. Her joy was greater than the joy of Moses, of Anna, of Debora, of Judith. " My soul," she cries in holy rapture, " doth magnify the Lord, more than I can express : all my senses, all my life, all my strength, I dedicate to the praise of God."

II. Let us endeavour to share the happiness of the Blessed Virgin, to praise God with her and for her.

To praise God is the great privilege of man over the rest of the visible creation, the glorious mission of intelligent beings, a sacred duty of which His unbounded goodness continually reminds us. Do we praise God as we ought ? "*Grati estote*"—" Be ye thankful"—is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Colossians. The giving of thanks is one of the objects of the institution of feasts. Do not these holy days pass by us unnoticed ? Do we devote a sufficient time in our prayers to the expression of our gratitude ? Observe that the Church in all her prayers, before asking a new favour, begins by recalling some blessing already conferred, and thanking God for it—" O God, Who hast left us in this wonderful Sacrament the memorial of Thy Passion "; " God Who hast taught the hearts of Thy chosen people by the light of the Holy Spirit "; and so on.

II. THEIR SOURCE.

I. Whence comes this holy fervour, this spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm, on the part of our

holy Mother? It comes from the contemplation of the majesty of God and her own lowliness. "God hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." See how conscious she is of her own nothingness! "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me." See how highly she esteems the favours of God.

II. Do we desire to keep alive in ourselves this feeling of gratitude? Let us try to realize how little we are, and how great are the designs that God wishes to fulfil in us.

If we are once convinced in our hearts that we are nothing, and have nothing of ourselves, we shall realize that nothing of all that God does for us is due to our own merit; and if we carefully consider the favours with which He loads us, our gratitude will increase with each new grace that we receive.

What a mistake it is, what false humility to pretend to be ignorant of the graces that we have received from God! Let us not be afraid to acknowledge that God has done great things in us, and intends to do greater things still. Only let us not lose sight of the utter nothingness of the foundation on which He condescends to build.

III. THE DIVINE PERFECTIONS TO WHICH MARY PAYS HOMAGE.

I. The gratitude of Mary ascends to God. In His infinite goodness she recognizes the ultimate reason of the favours He has shown her. "Almighty goodness," she cries, "all-holy, all-merci-

ful goodness, which brings back everything to itself ! He is mighty, Who has accomplished these wonders ; His Name is holy ; His mercy extends from generation to generation."

II. 1. The graces which God grants us are always an effect of His *power* : what power is needed to raise man to the level of his Maker ! Yet that is the ultimate object of all the favours of God.

2. Since the fall of Adam, who forfeited them by his sin, all these favours are an effect of Divine *mercy*.

3. Thirdly, every work of God manifests His *holiness*.

Let us glorify these attributes of God. His power and His mercy should fill us with confidence, and His holiness forbids us to misuse His gifts. We should turn them all to His glory.

COLLOQUY.

Let us earnestly ask of Our Lord, through Mary, this great grace, the source of unspeakable blessings, that we may understand and fulfil the duty of giving thanks to God.

Ave Maria.

SEVENTH DAY: THE MAGNIFICAT (SECOND PART).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In the second part of her canticle the Blessed Virgin magnifies three characteristics of Divine providence : (1) *God is pleased to confound pride* ; (2) *He exalts the humble*

and meek ; (3) *He fulfils His merciful promises.* We shall derive all the more consolation and fruit from these truths if we receive them from the very lips of our dear Mother.

MEDITATION.

“ *Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles* ”
—*He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble* (St. Luke i. 52).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the conclusion of the *Magnificat*: “ He hath showed might in His arm ; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy : as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to His seed for ever.”

Second Prelude.—Let us contemplate the Blessed Virgin with Elizabeth in the house of Zachary.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace to put on that humility which will deserve for us a special providence of God.

I. GOD CONFOUNDS PRIDE.

I. 1. “ God hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat : the rich He hath sent empty away.”

In pronouncing this sentence, Mary most probably remembered the great facts of sacred history—Pharaoh of Egypt humbled by Moses, the igno-

minious fall of Nabuchodonosor, and the tragic end of Baltasar and Antiochus.

2. Does this mean that power and riches in themselves are displeasing to God? Are they not His creatures? Is not the mighty man the image of his Creator?

Fascinated by outward show, men too commonly let their riches and power lead them to pride, and that is what ruins them. Such self-glorification gives no honour to God; and God asserts His own glory by scattering the proud. The end is sometimes delayed, but the prosperity of the wicked man is solid in appearance only; and the longer it lasts, the more terrible is the ruin which threatens it, like towers built upon the sand which fall with a greater crash the higher they are raised.

3. This pride appears in two forms: the proud man may defy God, and trust only in himself; or without denying the Divine origin of the gifts he enjoys, he may receive them as if they were his by right, and due to his own merits. The former view is the worst, but the most clearly erroneous; the latter is more dangerous to us, and all our impatience, our discontent, and discouragement show how easily we are inclined to this kind of pride.

II. Let us bear in mind that God will not tolerate vain-glory: the greater our success the greater should be our humility.

II. GOD EXALTS THE HUMBLE.

I. "God hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things." Is not this what Our Lord Himself said: "Blessed are the

meek, for they shall possess the land : blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled " ? (St. Matt. v. 4, 6).

While Mary was uttering these words, the thought of the humble David, the humble Esther, the humble Daniel, came into her mind, and, above all, she remembered the grace that she herself had just received.

To the poor and meek it is so easy to moderate their desires, and then the lavish bounty of God meets with no obstacle, but flows naturally, and fills their hearts to the uttermost.

II. 1. Let us imitate this goodness of God to the best of our poor ability ; let us use all the means we possess to spread happiness around us.

2. But, above all, let us hunger and thirst after Divine graces, that we may be sure to have our fill

III. GOD FULFILS HIS MERCIFUL PROMISES.

I. " He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers."

This great, this unspeakable mercy, promised ages before, is the blessing which Mary carries in her womb : it is the Messiah Whose reign is now about to commence.

II. We who live in the midst of that reign, so long expected, and now established, in spite of the unworthiness of men, enjoy the bounteous fulfilment of the Divine promise.

Although we have such good reason for believing in God's faithfulness to His promises, our hearts often waver ; and when we pray, a favour deferred seems a favour refused, and we become less able

to look forward to our eternal future with undoubting confidence.

It is this distrust that makes us poor and unhappy. May we at last put it away from us, that with Mary we may sing *Magnificat* here on earth, and hereafter in Heaven for all eternity!

COLLOQUY.

Let us earnestly ask for the grace of humble assurance for the future. Like trusting children, let us tell Mary our hopes and our fears, and implore her to show us the way to a holy peace.

Ave Maria.

EIGHTH DAY: THE TRIALS OF THE HOLY FAMILY.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—How mysterious are the ways of Providence! Mary went on her journey to Hebron at a time when there were no external signs of her pregnancy, and she immediately heard Elizabeth extol the miraculous working of the Holy Ghost. On her return to Nazareth three months later, when it was beginning to be evident that a child was to be born, she found that her husband had remained in ignorance of her condition. Now a disquieting doubt arose in Joseph's mind, and both he and Mary suffered a painful trial, in which, among other lessons, they learned the virtue of prudence. We shall consider (1) *the prudence of Mary*; (2) *the prudence of Joseph*; and (3) *the reward of that virtue in the holy pair*.

MEDITATION.

“ Joseph, fili David, noli timere accipere Mariam conjugem tuam ”—Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife (St. Matt. i. 20).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the circumstances of the case. St. Joseph, unable to understand the condition of his wife, was in a state of cruel uncertainty as to the course he should pursue. While he was minded to put Mary away privately, and to choose a line of conduct which, avoiding all scandal, should safeguard at the same time his careful obedience to the law and the reputation of a virgin whose virtue he admired, an Angel made known to him the designs of God upon Mary, and invested him with the rights of a father over the Saviour Who was to be born.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the humble dwelling of Nazareth, the scene of that sadness which was soon to be turned into holy joy.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to know and understand the virtues of Mary and Joseph, and especially their admirable prudence.

I. THE HUMBLE PRUDENCE OF MARY.

I. Mary, the object of the special designs of God, was afraid to interfere by any act of her own with the action of the Divine Will. The initiative always came from God. The Angel came from the Most High. The Holy Spirit is the author of what has been accomplished in her, and it is by God that Elizabeth has been informed of the progress of events. Mary does not consider herself at liberty to add a word for the purpose of inform-

ing St. Joseph. How admirable was her silence ! And yet it was doubly painful, both on account of what it made her fear for herself, and on account of the suffering which it caused to Joseph.

II. 1. Mary has more than once found among her most devoted servants heroic imitators of her marvellous prudence. Under the most insulting imputations men of eminent virtue have preferred to remain silent when a single word would have been enough to remove all suspicion from them. Such conduct proceeds rather from some special suggestion of the Holy Ghost than from the ordinary dictates of reason, even of a reason enlightened by faith. We should generally give to our reputation the same reasonable care which we do not refuse to give to the less important gift of health, for both are means of activity and influence. But God inspires some generous souls with the idea of such sacrifices, in order to show the value of humility, and to keep our care of our honour within proper limits. For us the imitation of Mary will consist in bearing cheerfully all loss of reputation which is the result of circumstances, even risking it voluntarily in a good cause, and not being too anxious to defend ourselves. Let us drive from our hearts all disquieting cares, and for no consideration consent to make false excuses to escape from our difficulties ; and after doing all we can, let us leave ourselves in the hands of God.

2. By the discreet reticence which she observed Mary intended to treat with proper respect a holy thing like the secret of the Incarnation of the Word. We, also, should observe a profound

respect for holy things, not to touch them rashly or without warrant. Holy is the Word of God. With what care, with what preparation should priests and instructors of youth expound it from the pulpit and in their Catechism classes! The charge of the confessor is holy, for there is no office in which man is so closely associated as a fellow-worker with God. How carefully, then, should the confessor weigh the advice that he gives in that sacred tribunal in which he sits in the place of Jesus Christ! The Church is holy. Is it prudent, then, for laymen to venture to express opinions, and pass judgment, and formulate censures on her doctrines and discipline? All legitimate authority is holy. We must never disparage it, and thus lessen the respect for authority which the public welfare demands.

II. THE PRUDENCE OF ST. JOSEPH.

I. The admirable prudence of St. Joseph is revealed in this—that, in spite of appearances, he was never led to believe in the existence of any fault in Mary, or to make any accusation against her. If appearances were against her, how eloquently all the acts of her life pleaded for her! And it was because Joseph did not neglect to take this into consideration that he suspended his judgment, and sought by his conduct to reconcile the letter of the law with the natural and just presumption of Mary's innocence.

II. What a lesson for our daily conduct towards our Superiors, our equals, and our inferiors!

(1) *Towards our Superiors.*—Far from condemning them, we should refrain from expressing judgment of their conduct. Who gave us the right to judge? and where shall we find sufficient materials for an impartial judgment? Let us remember this—the Superior is like a criminal who is condemned unheard, and who is generally prevented by an inflexible Rule from producing evidence in his own defence.

(2) *Towards our Equals.*—How often unjust suspicions divide and estrange us! How many men have become wicked simply because they have been judged to be so, and their minds have been embittered by calumny and unmerited suspicion! And how many others, on the contrary, owe the courage which is necessary for a complete reformation to the veil of secrecy under which their fault is hidden! Let us not condemn our neighbour too readily, relying only on outward appearances. If we are in doubt, it is better to err on the side of mercy. Let us follow the counsel of Our Lord: “Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned” (St. Luke vi. 37).

(3) As Superiors, we have, it is true, to judge our *inferiors*, but we should use great circumspection in doing so, and before pronouncing sentence we should use all the light we can obtain, and never omit to take into consideration all the presumptions that arise from previous good conduct. We can never win men's hearts if we do not show some confidence in them; unnecessary censures, and still more condemnations passed on doubtful evidence, cause irreparable mischief.

III. THE REWARD OF THIS PRUDENCE.

I. That hour of anxiety was followed by unmixed joy. Not only was the innocence and purity of Mary divinely revealed to Joseph, and his mind relieved of its heavy burden, but, more than that, he himself received the happy news of the coming of the Redeemer, and of this Redeemer he was the legal father. All the rights of a father were divinely conferred upon him. It was he who was destined to give the child the sweet name of Jesus. The Angel said to him distinctly : " Thou shalt call His name Jesus " (St. Matt. i. 21). Joseph was destined to give to Mary a higher and purer love than that of ordinary husbands, while his union with her resulted in a fruitfulness more glorious and beautiful than that of the most favoured marriage.

Let us offer our congratulations to the holy pair, and share in their joy.

II. Charitable prudence may often bring about a happy solution of difficulties. The desired result is obtained without wounding anyone, and without causing any estrangement. How beneficial is such prudence for the good of individuals or families or the common welfare of society !

COLLOQUY.

Let us resolve to be prudent and charitable in our judgment of others, and ask the intercession of Joseph, and then of Mary, that we may be faithful to these resolutions.

Ave Maria.

THIRD SECTION

THE NATIVITY

NINTH DAY: MARY THE MOTHER OF A
FIRST-BORN SON.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The ineffable mystery of the Nativity of Our Lord will show us in a series of meditations various aspects of the heart of the Mother of God. The sentiments of Mary will serve as the model for our own. In the first exercise, then, we shall consider the great truths which underlie all the words of this text, so sublime in its simplicity: “She brought forth her first-born Son.”

MEDITATION.

“*Peperit filium suum primogenitum*” — *She brought forth her first-born Son* (St. Luke ii. 7).

First Prelude.—Let us imagine the stable at Bethlehem, its smallness, its poverty.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray that we may follow the example of Mary, and profit by the birth of Jesus, in order to share more fully in the effects of that redemption which He came to bring to all men of good-will.

I. MARY BROUGHT FORTH—.

I. Tradition tells us that the Son of God wished to preserve to Mary the seal of her virginity perfectly intact. After the birth of the Saviour, as before it, the womb of Mary remained like the

closed gate which was situated on the east of the mysterious temple which Ezechiel saw in a vision on the mountain during the Captivity: "And behold the glory of the God of Israel came in by the way of the east; and the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered by it" (Ezech. xliv. 2). According to the Fathers, Mary is that closed gate through which only the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit was to penetrate, the gate ever shut before, during, and after the birth of the Saviour.

How sparing God is of His miracles! None was worked to prevent the fears of Joseph, none to adorn the dwelling in which the Son of God was born, none to stay the hands of the murderers charged by Herod with the cruel massacre of the Innocents. But He worked a miracle to preserve the virginity of His Mother.

II. Let us understand from this in what high esteem we should hold the virtue of purity, and still more the rare privilege of virginity. If God is willing to set aside the laws of Nature in order to preserve for His Mother even the outward lustre of these virtues, what care and what prudence we should exercise to save them from corruption!

II. HER SON.

I. How shall we describe, or even imagine, the holy joy of Mary when she sees and presses to her heart Him Whom she has borne in her womb—this Son Who is her God? What does she say to

Him ? We cannot rise to the sentiments of Mary, but we can try to guess what they must have been, and to feel some little of her joy.

And how Joseph shared in that joy ! Does he not love Mary dearly ? Is not Mary's happiness his own ? And how beautiful is the part he has to perform ! He is truly the husband of the Mother, and he has the rights of a father over the Infant God !

II. The joy of Mary and Joseph was all the greater because it was drawn from a source most holy and most pure. If every birth of a child gives joy to its parents, how much more does this one, which was not preceded by any fear nor accompanied by any suffering ! If any concupiscence of the flesh had had part in it, would it not have brought its defilements and its pains ?

Let us try to understand the loftiness of holy joys like this, and remember that we lose them if we follow the desires of the flesh.

III. FIRST-BORN.

I. 1. Our Lord was the first-born of Mary in this quite literal sense—that no other son had been born of her before Him ; that He entered into the Holy Family to be received and loved as the first-born, and to submit to the laws relating to the birth of a first-born son.

2. Moreover, He is the first-born morally among many brethren. His grace communicates His sonship, and we are all after Him children of God “ God,” says the Apostle, in speaking of the elect, “ has predestined them to be made conformable

to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren " (Rom. viii. 29).

3. He is also, as Word of God, Eternal Wisdom, by Whom all things were made, the first-born of every creature in Heaven and earth (Col. i. 15).

4. And He is also in relation to us the first-born of Mary. Being brethren of Jesus, we are in virtue of that title the dearly loved spiritual children of His blessed Mother.

COLLOQUY.

Let us rejoice over the birth of the Saviour, and offer our reverence to Mary and Joseph, and at the same time congratulate ourselves as being adopted brethren of Jesus and children of Mary. With such a claim upon her, let us make all our requests to our loving Mother with perfect confidence.

Ave Maria.

TENTH DAY: THE JOYS OF THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The birth of the Saviour was for Mary the source of a threefold joy, which we shall endeavour to understand better in the three points of this meditation: (1) The *joy of being saved*; (2) the *joy of being a mother*; (3) the *joy of giving Jesus to the world*.

MEDITATION.

"*Ipse salvum faciet populum suum*"—He shall save His people (St. Matt. i. 21).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the lowly stable in which our Saviour was born, and the poor crib in which He was laid.

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to share in the holy joy of the Blessed Virgin, in order that we also may feel the happy effects of it.

I. THE JOY OF BEING SAVED.

I. The birth of the Saviour was announced by the Angel as a source of joy to all people. Although this joy in its origin was common to all, yet it was unequally felt, owing to the difference in the dispositions of men. Many were even troubled and irritated by it. Look at the demonstrative joy of the shepherds, the quiet happiness of Simeon, the eloquent gratitude of Anna, and compare with these the disquiet of Herod, and later on the bitter vexation of the Pharisees. But who understood better than Mary the reasons for rejoicing? Who appreciated better than she the blessing of that special redemption which had exempted her alone from faults for which others had to ask pardon? What an inestimable value she attached to that grace of God which had kept far from her the great enemy of souls! Let us endeavour to understand in some degree the extent of her happiness.

II. In our time, also, the birth of the Saviour excites the anger of the wicked, leaves in indifference heretics and lukewarm Catholics, and fills the Saints with joy unspeakable. What impression is produced on us by the coming of Emmanuel, God with us? Do we often remember to thank God for having redeemed us? Let us strive after per-

fection, in order that we may better realize the happiness of Mary, and let us contrast our present lot with what it would have been if Christ had never come down upon earth.

II. THE JOY OF MOTHERHOOD.

I. Our Lord Himself bears witness to this joy. A woman, He tells us, remembers no more the anguish which is past, for joy that a man is born into the world (St. John xvi. 21). Who, then, can describe the joy of that blessed woman who without any pain has brought a Saviour into the world? Her God is her Son. She sees Him, touches Him, clothes Him, receives His caresses, and lavishes her own upon Him in return. What honour, what adoration is mingled with her maternal love! Let us try to imagine ourselves witnesses of this touching scene.

II. By our fidelity to grace we can spiritually reproduce Jesus Christ in ourselves. What, indeed, is the end of all grace, if not to transform us into the likeness of the Author of grace? By vocation the Christian is another Christ. It is a great thing to aspire to holiness, but how much more glorious and how much more to be desired is the realization of such an aspiration! But alas! how many pious designs remain simply conceived in the mind without ever being brought to fulfilment! Let us make of our hearts good ground on which the seed may spring up and bear fruit a hundredfold.

III. THE JOY OF GIVING JESUS TO THE WORLD.

I. Mary knew that she was bringing into the world a Saviour. It must have been to her an

unspeakable consolation to meditate on the mission of her Son—to think of the tears that He would wipe away, the chains that He would break, the precious freedom that He was to confer on the world. How she blessed God for having given her her Son, not for herself only, but for the salvation of all men.

II. A soul which sanctifies itself never goes to Heaven alone. This saying of St. Teresa adds another to the many strong motives for sanctifying ourselves in earnest, and if well understood, it will do away with the depressing influence of human respect. To do ill or to omit doing good for fear of displeasing men is to pay very dearly for the paltry satisfaction of avoiding a little shame ; to practise virtue without fear is to do a good action to our neighbour which will earn for us the esteem and gratitude of those whom we have edified or brought to salvation.

COLLOQUY.

Let us rejoice with Mary, and adore Jesus with her, and pray for the grace to arrive at perfection and to practise an apostolate among those around us.

Ave Maria.

ELEVENTH DAY: THE SWADDLING-CLOTHES OF JESUS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We shall consider
 (1) the *swaddling-clothes which covered our Saviour* ;
 (2) the *poverty of which they were the sign* ; and
 (3) the *riches contained for us in that poverty*.

MEDITATION.

"Et pannis eum involvit"—*And she wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes* (St. Luke ii. 7).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves again the poor stable in which our Saviour was born.

Second Prelude.—Let us implore our Saviour through His blessed Mother to teach us and enrich us by His poverty.

I. THE SWADDLING-CLOTHES.

I. 1. Let us imagine with what affectionate care the Blessed Virgin swathed for the first time the tender limbs of the Son of God. Let us see her profound reverence, her gentleness, and the love which is shown in her solicitude. From her has come that flesh which shivers in the cold night ; it is her hand which must cover it in its swaddling-clothes.

2. All the acts of our exterior worship are like swaddling-clothes with which we clothe Our Lord. Let us perform those acts with a careful exactness which shall show our reverence and our love.

II. 1. The swaddling-clothes are the garments of humility and weakness. He, the Innocent and the Strong, accepts them for us, to show that He wishes to share all our misery.

2. Let us thank Him with all our hearts, and while we await that glorious day when a spiritual body shall take the place of the poor dwelling in which our soul is now imprisoned, let us accept with patience the humiliation which is the result of sin.

II. THE SIGN OF POVERTY.

I. Swaddling-clothes are common to the children of princes and beggars alike, but the differences between the classes begin from the cradle. What clothes did Our Lord choose? Those of the poor. And why? To show us that His love and His redemption are for all, and that the poor are not excluded from sharing them. Later the world will know that the poor are the favoured ones, and that Our Lord attaches little importance to human pomp or external appearances. Let us also learn, while we observe the rules of our station, to despise the vanities of a luxurious life, and let not our esteem for persons and things be measured by the splendour of their surroundings.

III. THE RICHES CONTAINED FOR US IN THIS POVERTY.

I. "Being rich, He became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty you might be rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9). These eloquent words of St. Paul teach us what is the generous exchange which Heaven proposes to earth, Almighty God to His creature. "Give me your poor gifts in exchange for My supernatural favours. I become like to you that you may become like to Me." What an example of Divine munificence!

II. I. Let us show our gratitude to God, and never hesitate to accept His offers. Let us not grudge the little that we are able to give Him in return. Let us assure Him that we are ready to accept whatever He sends us, and at the sight of the poor swaddling-clothes which cover Him let us

offer ourselves to Him, that we may imitate Him by detachment from the things of this world, or even, if He so wills, by actual poverty, whether it is forced upon us, or is the result of a free choice.

2. Among all creatures, the Blessed Virgin has best found true riches in the poverty of that God Who is hers and ours alike. No one has imitated Our Lord as she has done. Let us admire her wisdom.

COLLOQUY.

In conclusion, let us ask Mary to obtain for us from her Divine Son the great grace of spiritual poverty.

Ave Maria.

TWELFTH DAY : THE CRIB OF JESUS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The crib of our Saviour suggests three points for our meditation : (1) *A suffering* ; (2) *a choice* ; (3) *a symbol*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Et reclinavit eum in præsepio* ”—*And she laid Him in a manger* (St. Luke ii. 7).

I. THE SUFFERING IN THE CRIB.

I. We may reflect, in this first point, on the distress which the Blessed Virgin suffered at having no other cradle to give to her Divine Son but a manger, and on the care which she took to soften its hardness as well as she could. Let us watch

her solicitude, and imagine the inward acts of love which accompany it. Let us offer ourselves to the Blessed Virgin with simplicity to help her to place Jesus in His little crib.

2. In how many poor churches may the tabernacles be compared to this poor crib! Can we not help to beautify them by our work and our liberality? Are we careful to treat our Divine Guest with suitable respect by keeping the altar and all its furniture perfectly neat and clean, and the sanctuary lamp always burning? Do we ensure Jesus Christ a place of honour in the Church? If we can do nothing for the external decoration of the temple, let us at least offer frequent and fervent homage to the God of the Holy Eucharist. And while we thus show our good-will, let us not forget to express our desire to do better. Let us confess our own insufficiency, and endeavour to make up for it by the love with which we present our poor offerings.

II. THE CHOICE OF THE CRIB.

I. 1. Jesus, when He lay in the crib, was not compelled by necessity to do so. Having the choice of all things, He preferred a humble manger to comfort and luxury.

2. Having realized that his choice was entirely voluntary, let us try to understand the meaning of it. It is Our Lord's declaration of war against luxury in little things. Let us think of the evil effects of this luxury (*a*) on the body, which it renders delicate and exacting—hence come whims and fancies, which lessen our influence and author-

ity ; (b) on the mind, which is weakened and enervated by it ; (c) on the souls of others, whose progress and conversion are hindered by it. This striving after ease and luxury is incompatible with generosity ; it is an obstacle to any real apostolic work. It does more harm to the preacher and the missionary than cowardice in face of great danger or suffering.

III. THE SYMBOL OF THE CRIB.

Do you not see how this crib offers to all men the Child who lies there ? He is there, ready to receive the worship of all. If we may believe the simple old pious tradition, He did not despise the warm breath of the poor animals. But, above all, He is in the manger to give Himself for our food. The name of Bethlehem, which in Hebrew signifies " the house of bread," and the sight of this manger, reminded the holy Fathers of the words which Jesus spoke of Himself : " I am the Bread of life " (St. John vi. 48). The Jesus of the crib symbolizes the Jesus of the Eucharist, despised by some, visited and received with joy by others ; the food of all, friends and enemies alike—of enemies to glut their anger, of friends to be their pure delight. Let us be of those for whom He is their life-giving food.

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask Mary, who laid Jesus in His crib, to help us to receive Him worthily into our hearts, and let us offer to our dear Lord Himself our resolutions of love and sacrifice.

Ave Maria.

THIRTEENTH DAY : THE SELF-EFFACEMENT OF JESUS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—After the simple mention of the stable and the manger, the Evangelist adds these words, which complete the picture of the first sufferings of our Saviour : “ There was no room for them in the inn.” We shall, therefore, take for our meditation (1) the *self-effacement of Jesus* ; (2) the *providential reason of His exclusion* ; (3) the *blindness of the inhabitants of Bethlehem*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Non erat eis locus in diversorio* ”—*There was no room for them in the inn* (St. Luke ii. 7).

First Prelude.—Let us again picture to ourselves the stable, and the manger in which the Divine Infant was laid.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask our dear Saviour to grant us by His holy Mother a large share of His Spirit.

I. THE HUMILIATION, THE SELF-EFFACEMENT OF JESUS.

1. The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph could find no room in the village inn. When they presented themselves, they were met with the reply : “ There is no room for you here.” The refusal did not imply any ill-will. The place was really overcrowded, and the holy pair had nothing to show that they were entitled to be treated with exceptional favour. Their lowliness was humiliating,

and must have been painful to the heart of the Blessed Virgin, not on her own account, but on account of her Divine Son, the Son of God, the Son of David, despised in the city of His royal ancestors as a poor Child of no importance. How keenly must she have felt the pain which comes from the consciousness of high dignity unrecognized or unappreciated.

2. It is harder sometimes for our self-esteem to be ignored than to be treated with actual disrespect ; but, on the other hand, how eloquently Our Lord taught us during His life by word and example to accept and even to seek obscurity and neglect ! And how many reasons we have for being willing to pass our days in obscurity !

Yet how sensitive we have been, how full of pretension ! For the least merit, for the most insignificant success, we have expected to be treated with favour and distinction, and we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus !

II. THE PROVIDENTIAL REASON FOR THE EXCLUSION.

I. 1. Would Our Lord have been in His proper place in the turmoil of an inn ? The grotto of Bethlehem was poorer, but how much more peaceful ! The turmoil of the inn is a fitting symbol of dissipation, and confusion, and the worries of worldly business, and in the midst of these there is no place for Jesus.

2. The scene of the hotel with its tumult and confusion reflects what passes in so many hearts, full of cares and troubles, of plans and schemes of

worldly business, of pleasures and regrets. In this confusion a man hardly knows where he is. He has no time for devotion. It is hard for God to find a place in such a life.

II. Let us avoid all dissipation and anxiety about worldly things, if we would inwardly enjoy the possession of God.

III. THE BLINDNESS OF THE INHABITANTS OF BETHLEHEM.

1. Absorbed in the business of the moment, the people who fill the inn are unable to recognize the Holy Family, and to understand their own most important interests. They let the hour of the visit of the Lord pass by.

2. How many men are slaves to their worldly affairs! How many are too busy to make a retreat, to devote any time to the salvation of their souls, to make sure of a happy eternity! They are invited to the kingdom of God, to the banquet of Divine favours, and they offer the same variety of excuses that roused the anger of the host in the parable.

This is what goes on in the world generally, and to some extent among priests and religious. Even those who are consecrated to God seem sometimes as if they could find no time to think of their Divine Master.

Let us pray for these misguided men, and avoid following their example.

COLLOQUY.

Let us offer to Jesus through Mary, with profound devotion, our resolutions of humility and recollection.

Ave Maria.

FOURTEENTH DAY: THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—There is a sweet air of simplicity and sincerity about this scene of the call of the shepherds, and their adoration of Jesus, the contemplation of which should confirm us in our resolutions of uprightness and humility. In order that we may reap spiritual profit therefrom, we shall consider (1) the *obedience of the shepherds to the voice of the Angels*; (2) the *voluntary self-effacement of St. Joseph*; and (3) the *conversation of the shepherds with Mary*.

MEDITATION.

“*Transeamus usque Bethlehem*”—*Let us go over to Bethlehem* (St. Luke ii. 15).

First Prelude.—Let us remember that an Angel was deputed by God to announce to the poor shepherds the glorious news of the coming of the Saviour. Soon there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly army, singing the praises of the Most High. When the Angels departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds, obedient to the heavenly call, went their way to the stable, where

they found the Child with His Mother, and told her and St. Joseph what they had seen and heard. Mary kept all these words, says the Evangelist, pondering them in her heart.

Second Prelude.—Let us view the hills which witnessed the apparition of the Angels, and return to the poor stable at Bethlehem in which Our Lord was born.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus and Mary.

I. THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS.

1. It will be good for us first to imagine the touching spectacle of the simple shepherds, surprised by the appearance of the Angel, who tells them his wonderful news ; then the Heavens opening and the celestial music which only these poor villagers could hear. This shows how God esteems the most obscure of men, and how little He regards social position. What surprises the Divine counsels have in store for us !

2. These shepherds, the elect of Israel, were simple, unsophisticated souls. Their very simplicity and uprightness were their best protection against the wiles of the Devil. When men are vain enough to think they have a right to expect communications from Heaven, God often allows them to fall into error ; but He leads by the hand those who, with no thought of self, seek only to obey His call. Such are the shepherds of Bethlehem. God invites them, and they set out at once without delay or discussion. Their confidence will not be disappointed.

3. What do they find? The Child with His Mother—*puerum cum matre*. It is in the bosom of Mary that Jesus shows Himself for the first time to men.

He who seeks for Jesus in earnest will find Him with His Mother. There is no opposition, but, on the contrary, a close connection between devotion to Jesus and devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

II. THE SHEPHERDS AND ST. JOSEPH.

1. St. Joseph was present at the reception of the shepherds, for the Evangelist expressly mentions him (St. Luke ii. 16). Nothing, however, is said of his presence during the visit of the Magi, and no doubt the holy patriarch remained in the background. Yet it was his part to protect the good name of Mary, to be present at the interview, and watch over the safety of the Child and His Mother. But, conscious of the immense superiority of Jesus and Mary, though he is sufficiently in evidence to protect her honour, he effaces himself on occasions when he might be put into comparison with them.

2. This humility makes him very dear to Jesus and Mary, and in return for having been less conspicuous before a few rich men, he will be more glorious before the eyes of all the world; for, having been humble and retiring here, he will receive honours throughout eternity.

3. Let us not forget that a similar compensation is offered to us. If we seek praise here below, and crave earthly rewards, we make light of the eternal reward which God has in store for all

good work which is done for His sake, and such an unworthy ambition will bring us only mortification and continual disappointment.

III. THE SHEPHERDS AND MARY.

1. Let us endeavour to realize the scene which the Evangelist leaves to our imagination. Let us watch the arrival of the shepherds, their shyness on entering the stable, their joyful surprise, their silence in presence of the Divine manifestation. Encouraged by the kind look and smile of Mary, they draw near, and bend low in adoration ; and when they rise, they begin to tell all they have seen and heard. How happy they feel, and how eager they are to bring others to worship the Infant Saviour !

2. Mary rejoices greatly at this confirmation of the words of the Angel Gabriel. Her faith is rewarded by a new light.

Yet, even when she receives her greatest consolation, what admirable prudence she displays ! She listens to the story of the shepherds, but she herself says nothing of what has taken place in her. She listens in order to ponder all these things in her heart.

COLLOQUY.

Let us with simplicity and confidence ask our dear Lord to give us His grace to walk in the footsteps of our holy Mother.

Ave Maria.

FOURTH SECTION

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE AND
THE HIDDEN LIFEFIFTEENTH DAY: THE PRESENTATION OF
THE INFANT JESUS TO THE LORD.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this first meditation on the great mystery of the hidden life of our Saviour we shall consider (1) *the entrance of Jesus into the Temple*; (2) *His presentation to the Lord*; and (3) *the sacrifice made by Mary*.

MEDITATION.

“Tulerunt illum in Jerusalem, ut sisterent eum Domino”—They carried Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (St. Luke ii. 22).

First Prelude.—According to the Jewish law, the mother of a first-born son was bound to present her child to God forty days after his birth, and to offer for herself a lamb of a year old for a holocaust, and a young pigeon or a turtle-dove, and deliver them into the hands of the priest. The poor were allowed to offer a second turtle-dove in place of the lamb. The offering symbolized the supreme dominion of God over all His creatures. In the ceremony the first-born was to be redeemed with a price, and the Levites were taken in his place to serve the Lord in the tabernacle.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the road from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, about two hours' journey, and then the Temple of the Lord.

Third Prelude.—Let us beg for the grace to imitate Our Divine Lord and His holy Mother in their perfect generosity towards God.

I. JESUS CARRIED TO THE TEMPLE.

I. Let us watch Joseph and Mary walking along, in modest attire, from Bethlehem, the house of bread, to Jerusalem, the city of peace. Mary carries Jesus, and Joseph walks beside her, showing in his looks the tranquillity of a pure soul and the tender care of a husband and father. They meditate as they go. With maternal love the Blessed Virgin presses to her bosom the Infant God. Their departure from Bethlehem and their arrival at Jerusalem excite no curiosity. They set out and reach their journey's end unperceived, and yet what wonderful things are to be accomplished !

This is the first entrance of the Lord into Jerusalem and into the Temple. This edifice had been raised again from its ruins, but not so glorious as when it was built by Solomon. As the prophet Aggeus said : " Who is left among you that saw this house in its first glory ? And how do you see it now ? Is it not in comparison to that as nothing in your eyes ? " (Agg. ii. 4). But now it was destined to receive an inestimable honour. " The Desired of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts " (Agg. ii. 8). God confounds us by the very simplicity with which He realizes His wonderful designs, and although there was to be nothing in the ceremony except what was prescribed by the law for all, yet

what value that simple rite had in the eyes of God, and how great was its influence on the fate of the whole human race !

II. 1. Do we sufficiently appreciate the honour which our Divine Guest does us when, without any solemnity, He makes His entrance into the temple of our hearts ? Let us receive Him with lively faith.

2. The same exterior actions have very different values, according to our intentions and the inward dispositions with which we perform them.

II. JESUS PRESENTED TO THE LORD.

I. 1. He Who is offered is a first-born son, but not an ordinary first-born. He is the first-born of every creature, the chief of the human race. As Bourdaloue expresses it, the oblation of Jesus was as a tribute paid for all nations and all peoples. He represents us all, and as the first-born of all He answers to God for Himself and for us, unless we are wicked enough to deny Him, and blind enough to separate ourselves from Him. In Him all human beings join to-day in rendering to God the duty of their submission. By His obedience He brings back under the dominion of God all who had been led away from it by sin.

2. How perfect is His oblation ! St. Paul has interpreted for us the thought of His heart. " Sacrifices and oblations and holocausts for sin Thou wouldest not, neither are they pleasing to Thee, which are offered according to the law. Then said I, Behold I come to do Thy will, O God " (Heb. x. 8, 9). And where was this will to lead ?

To the salvation of mankind by the death of Jesus on the Cross.

II. 1. Let us hasten to ratify the offering made in our name by our Elder Brother.

2. Let us understand that the offerings of the heart are not without value in God's sight. Certainly, when there is some good action to be done, a mere inward wish cannot take the place of the deed which is expected of us. These idle wishes only serve to deceive us, and hide our want of real generosity; but when they are the result of sincere feeling, inward offerings prepare the way for real sacrifices. Let us say with St. Ignatius: "Take, O Lord, my entire liberty, my understanding, my memory, and all my faculties—all that I have, and all that I possess. All is Thine. Dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me only Thy love and Thy grace, and I shall be rich enough. I ask nothing more."

III. JESUS PRESENTED BY MARY.

I. 1. There is one person who unites herself with this offering of the Saviour, and that not only as a human creature, following the common leader of the whole human race, but as having a special sacrifice to make in the person of that leader. That is Mary, His Mother. She offers to God her only Son; she offers Him that God may dispose of Him according to His own will, and for our eternal welfare.

St. Peter speaks (1 Pet. ii. 5, 9) of the royal priesthood of all the faithful, called upon to offer to God acceptable spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifice

of our devotion and our service. What, then, was the royal priesthood of Mary, holding in her arms the Son of God, and sacrificing herself in spirit for the salvation of the world !

2. Let us admire the vocation of the Blessed Virgin, and learn from her to exercise our priesthood by sacrificing to God all that we hold dear. Nothing exalts a man so much as a generous sacrifice. Plato placed in this the perfection of justice.

II. In spite of the reality of His offering, Jesus wished, nevertheless, that the legal ceremony of redemption should be observed on His behalf. He Who was to redeem us all was given back to His Mother at the price of a few sicles, and when He was given back to her He was given back to us, and He became ours also, while He belonged wholly to God.

He desires to be really ours, and He will be ours for ever, if only we in our turn are willing to make the little sacrifice necessary to insure that His merits may be applied to us. He will be ours according as we fulfil what God asks of us in order that we may be holy and just.

COLLOQUY.

A fervent prayer will unite us with the sacrifice of Jesus and Mary. Let us make it, and offer to God all our goodwill.

Ave Maria.

SIXTEENTH DAY: THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In presenting herself with the Infant Jesus in the Temple, Mary fulfilled a double law—first, as it affected herself; secondly, as it concerned her Divine Son. As we have considered the latter, we shall now turn to the former, and contemplate this pious submission of Mary to a humiliating law as (1) *a painful sacrifice*; (2) *dictated by the most holy motives*; (3) *accomplished by the most exalted virtue*.

MEDITATION.

“*Secundum quod dictum est in lege Domini*”—According as it is written in the law of the Lord (St. Luke ii. 24).

First Prelude.—Let us call to mind the Jewish law, which required every woman who became a mother to present herself in the Temple after forty or eighty days, according as the child was a son or a daughter, in order to purify herself by the offering of a sacrifice. Mary comes on the appointed day to comply with the provisions of the law.

Second Prelude.—Let us think of the Temple of Jerusalem. The ceremony took place in one of the buildings in front of the sanctuary.

Third Prelude.—Let us pray that we may be filled with the spirit which animated the Blessed Virgin, and make that the mainspring of our actions.

I. THE SACRIFICE FOR MARY.

I. 1. This submission of the Blessed Virgin is at first sight somewhat surprising. The law in question was the penalty of the sin of our father Adam. From that time the mother of a child conceived in sin contracts a sort of impurity, of which she is reminded by the pains she has endured. But Jesus came to destroy original sin. Instead of suffering pain, His Mother was filled with unspeakable joy; and instead of being rendered impure, Mary saw the seal placed upon her virginal purity. The law, then, could not in any respect apply to her.

2. And at what price did the Blessed Virgin submit to the law? At the price of a voluntary humiliation in hiding from the world her wonderful privileges. How different was her conduct from what would have been dictated by counsels of mere human prudence! She put forward her vow of virginity at a time when any other woman would have disclaimed it, when the Angel proposed that she should become the Mother of God. And she concealed this virginity when any other woman would have paraded it, when she might have asserted it in order to be exempt from the laws. But what a humiliation it was for her, nevertheless! for nothing cost Mary such pain as to be thought to have lost her virginal purity.

II. Let this example of Mary give us courage—first, to accept humiliations; and, secondly, not to seek to make a display of our advantages. True virtue is conspicuous, in spite of itself.

II. REASONS FOR THIS SACRIFICE.

I. 1. The Blessed Virgin was led to submit to this humiliation, first, by the desire to imitate our Lord. Jesus accepts the common lot of children, submitting even to circumcision. Mary wishes to follow Him, and share the common lot of mothers.

2. Secondly, she was actuated by motives of edification and prudence. Mary could not avoid obedience to the law without either giving scandal or publishing the miracle which entitled her to exemption.

Her charity would not allow her to cause scandal, and she did not dare to take upon herself to reveal the mysteries of God. It was for God, the Master of His gifts, to make them known if He thought fit. Mary had kept silence before Joseph. How, then, should she speak before strangers?

II. These same reasons of humility and edification, this same desire to imitate Our Lord, impel the truly spiritually-minded man to avoid any appearance of singularity. In his interior life he strives after perfection, but in his outward conduct he must make sacrifices in order to comply with recognized customs and to avoid giving offence, and he makes no exception to this rule without sufficient reason.

III. THE VIRTUE NECESSARY FOR THE SACRIFICE.

I. In order to practise this simple obedience, Mary needed (1) great independence of spirit, which enabled her to disregard the opinions of

men ; (2) great faith in the watchfulness with which God and the Angels observe our actions and intentions ; (3) perfect confidence in the providential direction of events, or, to put it in another way, a firm persuasion that one who acts according to the dictates of conscience may safely leave the results to God.

II. In our spiritual life we cannot value too highly our freedom of action. Dependence upon others is a frequent cause of weakness or sin.

A lively faith must bring us nearer to God, and, above all, we shall find rest and holiness if we are fully persuaded that our life cannot be a failure if we always do what is best.

COLLOQUY.

Let us pray the Blessed Virgin by all her suffering to obtain for us this heavenly wisdom from her Divine Son.

Ave Maria.

SEVENTEENTH DAY: THE AGED SIMEON AND HIS PROPHECY.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Our attention has been directed to the double law of sacrifice and purification to which Jesus and Mary designed to submit. We shall now contemplate the two holy persons whom the Gospel brings on the scene—the aged Simeon and Anna the prophetess. The *thanksgiving* and the *prophecy* of the venerable old man will form the two points of our meditation.

MEDITATION.

"Ipse accepit eum in ulnas suas, et benedixit Deum"—He took Him into his arms, and blessed God (St. Luke ii. 28).

First Prelude.—St. Luke tells us that there was then in Jerusalem a man named Simeon, just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came by the Spirit into the Temple at the moment when Jesus was brought in by His parents. He recognized the Saviour, took Him into his arms, and blessed God, adding to his thanksgiving a remarkable prophecy on the work of the Redeemer, the treatment He should receive from men, and the future trials of the Blessed Virgin.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the entrance to the Temple, where these events took place.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly implore Our Lord, through His Mother, to make Himself known and loved by us, in order that we may find in Him, not an occasion of our fall, but a source of holiness and salvation.

I. THE THANKSGIVING.

I. 1. Let us recall the description of the Evangelist, and imagine the scene. For a long time this holy old man had lived in hope, waiting (as St. Luke says) for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Ghost, in answer to his pious prayers, had

assured him that before he died the Lord's Anointed should be made manifest to him. A prophetic instinct revealed to him that the solemn moment had arrived. He went to the Temple, saw the Child, and recognized in Him the desired one of the patriarchs and prophets. In holy rapture he extends his arms, and the Blessed Virgin lays the Divine Child upon them. Who can describe the emotion of this Simeon, a just man under the old law, and his gratitude for the touching attention of Mary? He is satisfied now; he is content to die in peace. Not only have his eyes seen, but his arms have held and pressed to his heart the destined Saviour of all nations, the Light of the Gentiles, and the Glory of God's people Israel.

2. The discourse of the old man and his transports of joy fill Mary and Joseph with wonder. Thus, while Mary has kept silence with the most perfect prudence, God has multiplied His testimonies all round her. More and more she rejoices at having believed the promises of the Almighty.

The plain meaning of Simeon's prophecy adds to their supernatural consolation as the mission of the Child is unfolded with increased clearness. To Joseph and the shepherds He was announced as the salvation of His people, but according to Simeon, this people was not only Israel, but all the nations of the world. What joy our dear Mother must have felt when she learned that all the world was to share in this happiness!

II. We, in our turn, the redeemed among the Gentiles, must bless God, and profit by this abundant redemption for ourselves and for others,

II. THE PROPHECY.

I. 1. After his first burst of gratitude, the holy old man turns his thoughts to Christ and His future destiny. He had already described the ideal mission of Jesus—a mission of salvation and glory, which might become the reality if it were not for the free-will of man and his frequent lapses from grace. One glance at the parents of the Saviour, poor and unnoticed in the crowd, brings the real future before him. Immediately after having blessed and congratulated them, he cries out: "This Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many." He who could and would be only their Saviour will be the Man above all rejected and contradicted. Until the solemn assize, when the Angels shall divide into two opposite classes the men of whom He is the Sovereign Judge, Christ passes through the world, loved and honoured by some, hated and persecuted by others, separating the good from the wicked, and revealing the inmost thoughts of all hearts. Wherever He goes, He cannot bear that men should remain in a state of cold and listless indifference. He is True Life Himself, and He calls out to the indolent to arise. His teaching and example draw some to follow in His steps, and excite in others only implacable hostility. He says Himself: "I am not come to bring peace, but a sword."

2. For nineteen hundred years the prophecy has not failed of fulfilment. Infidel nations are sunk in lethargy. Christ comes, and there is a general awakening—for some an awakening to resurrection,

for others to ruin. It was thus for the synagogue ; it is thus for all Europe and Christian countries. Christ is the centre of all controversies. " He that is not with Me is against Me " (St. Luke xi. 23). Thus, He sets Himself for a sign which shall be contradicted.

II. May the example of Christ inflame our zeal ! We are assuredly on the side of Christ, but do we fight for Him as valiantly as we ought ? Do we prepare ourselves for the fight with sufficient earnestness ? Do we follow Him, not only in matters of precept, but in the way which leads to perfection ? Is our reception of Him such as to raise and sanctify us, or such as to destroy or weaken our spiritual life ?

COLLOQUY.

Let us beg Our Lord to be more and more our Saviour ; let us offer Him our resolution to fight valiantly for His cause, both within ourselves and without ; and let us ask, through the intercession of His holy Mother, the grace of perseverance in those holy dispositions which she loves so much to see in us.

Ave Maria.

EIGHTEENTH DAY: THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON (*concluded*).

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—Simeon addressed the second part of his discourse to Mary alone. We shall see (1) *why Mary alone should be addressed ;*

then we shall consider (2) the *sorrows which were predicted for her*; and (3) the *mission she has to fulfil towards us*.

MEDITATION

“Tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius”—*Thy own soul a sword shall pierce* (St. Luke ii. 35).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the prophecies which Simeon unfolds to Mary. Our Lord is set for the fall and resurrection of many; He shall be contradicted more than anyone in the world; Mary's own soul a sword shall pierce; and by all this the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed.

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine the approach to the Temple of Jerusalem.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask the grace to love the Blessed Virgin more and more, to show her a more tender and more trusting affection.

I. THE REASON FOR SPEAKING TO MARY ONLY.

I. At first sight it seems strange that Simeon, having congratulated Mary and Joseph, should not address the conclusion of his discourse to them both. But the Scripture says distinctly: “He said to Mary His Mother.” Can we not see in these words a prophetic instinct, suggesting a new application of a constant rule? Joseph is there only to preserve the honour of Mary, and to protect the Infant Jesus, not to obscure our view of the Child and His Mother. That is why Simeon addressed himself to Mary alone. She only was to survive the hidden life of Our Lord, and to see the accomplishment of the sorrowful prediction,

Let us admire this wise economy of the Gospel which leads men by degrees to the knowledge of the true Sonship of Christ. Let us also understand better the incomparable greatness of the Blessed Virgin, who is continually mentioned with her Divine Son.

St. Joseph, too, gives us an example of meritorious modesty in always voluntarily standing aside, so as not to distract our attention from Jesus and Mary.

2. Let us ask ourselves in this connection whether, in doing good, we do not seek our own glory. Do we always look to Jesus only? If we do, then there will be neither suspicion nor jealousy in our hearts. We shall be desirous that the good may be done, but we shall care much less that it is done by ourselves, and we shall not seek the most honourable offices, but the most useful.

II. THE SORROW ANNOUNCED TO MARY.

1. "*Thy soul a sword shall pierce.*" What an expressive description of incomparable sorrow! These words were verified all through the human life of Our Lord, in that He was constantly slighted and denied. They had their final and complete fulfilment on Calvary. Let us think of the tenderness of a mother's heart, and then of the gentleness of Jesus, and all His manifold sufferings. With the Man of Sorrows, compare His suffering Mother. How sharp was the point of that sword! how deeply it was plunged into her heart!

2. Shall we be content to understand the

immensity of her sorrow? We ought to wish also to share it. At least, let us try to feel compassion, and weep for the guilty cowardice which has led us to betray Jesus, to deny Him, to violate His precepts, and despise His counsels. Let us promise Him a perfect and constant fidelity, and let us ask Mary by the memory of her sorrows to obtain it for us.

III. THE MISSION DEVOLVED UPON MARY.

I. Mary suffers with Jesus, and for Him. Is there not a deep meaning in this community of sorrows? Does it not give support to the formal expression of St. Ephrem, that great doctor of the fourth century, who, in his prayer to the Blessed Virgin, addresses her as the mediatrix of the world? Could it be without design that the Gospel itself unites the two sufferings, and that Simeon attributes to the sorrow of Mary, as well as to the contradiction suffered by Jesus, the wonderful power of judging men and revealing the thoughts of their inmost hearts? Does it not also remind us of the picture of the mother and her son which God showed to our first parents after their unhappy fall? If we are redeemed only by the merits of Jesus, do not the sorrows of Mary, sanctified by those merits, obtain for us their application, and complete the work of our redemption by helping us to feel a more complete confidence? The sufferings of the Saints, united to those of our Redeemer, have contributed to the salvation of many. Mary, imitating her Son, has offered her sufferings for the whole human race; they con-

tribute to the salvation of all the elect. The sufferings of Mary give us the mediatrix of grace and the co-redemptress of all mankind.

2. Let us in our turn generously accept, both for ourselves and for others, the portion of trial and suffering which God wills that we should endure. Let us constantly ask for the intercession of Mary with her Divine Son.

COLLOQUY.

At the end of the meditation let us turn to Mary with affectionate expressions of compassion and loving confidence.

Ave Maria.

NINETEENTH DAY: ANNA THE PROPHETESS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We cannot leave the mystery of the Presentation without giving our attention for a few moments to the touching incident in which a pious widow is the principal figure. Let us consider (1) the *merit of the person*; (2) the *revelation which was made to her*; (3) the *condescension of Mary towards her*.

MEDITATION.

“Confitebatur Domino, et loquebatur de illo”—*She confessed to the Lord, and spoke of Him* (St. Luke ii. 38).

First Prelude.—As Simeon entered the Temple, there came also a widow named Anna, advanced in years and full of merits, whom the Gospel praises

for her pure and austere life, devoted to the service of God. She recognized the Child, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel.

Second Prelude.—The scene is still at the entrance of the Temple. Let us picture to ourselves the approach to the sacred edifice.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace to know how to love Jesus and Mary, that we may imitate the fervour of this holy prophetess.

I. THE MERIT OF HOLY ANNA.

I. The Evangelist, in a few quick strokes, draws for us a complete portrait of a holy widow. While still in the flower of her youth, Anna had lost her husband, after seven short years of married life. This bereavement had probably taught her the vanity of earthly things, and she had turned completely towards the things of Heaven (1) by the practice of perfect continence ; (2) by a life devoted to fasting and penance ; (3) by constant prayers in the holy place. She departed not (the Gospel tells us) from the Temple.

Thus, God had given her that prophetic spirit, the source of edification and consolation, by which the hidden things of the future are revealed.

II. 1. What a model for us is this holy widow ! A model of devout life, inspired by the grace of Jesus Christ, before having witnessed His Divine example. We may well suppose that St. Paul had her in his mind when he described the model Christian widow : “ She that is a widow indeed and desolate, let her trust in God, and continue in supplications and

prayers night and day " (1 Tim. v. 5). The primitive Church gave an official character to such widows, employing them to instruct and baptize persons of their own sex ; and in our own day, how much good is done by women who are free from worldly occupations, who live only for God and their neighbours ! Whole parishes, whole towns, find in them protecting angels.

Whatever may be our condition, we may learn from the life of Anna the prophetess a lesson of fervour and encouragement. Much good work is within the reach of every strong and generous soul.

2. Let us remark that this widow prayed by preference in the Temple. She knew that prayers offered in the holy place ascended to God perfumed by the incense of sacrifice and public worship. If the prophetess was justly attracted by the symbolic holiness of the Temple of Jerusalem, how much more powerfully should we be drawn to those churches and chapels which Our Lord sanctifies by the Sacrifice of the Mass and by His continual presence ! Let us love to say our prayers, when we can, in those places which are consecrated to the worship of God.

II. THE REVELATION OF THE SAVIOUR.

I. Guided by her prophetic instinct, Anna recognizes the Saviour. Her consolation is unspeakably great ; but, not content with feeling it herself, she hastens to share it with the other pious persons present, with " all that looked for the redemption of Israel."

II. 1. When we contemplate the holy and un-

selfish joy of this pious widow, let us remark how Our Lord dispenses His gifts, and distributes His tasks according to the condition of the elect. Simeon, as a man capable of authority, is entrusted with an active mission, and prophesies the destinies of the Saviour and the Virgin. Anna is simply consoled, and her influence is exercised in private conversations. Mary, as a woman, does not teach ; but as Mother of God, the most beautiful part falls to her lot—that of sharing in the sacrifice and the work of redemption.

2. When we reflect on these three destinies, we shall find that all three are holy and enviable. Consolations are a help which it would be presumptuous to refuse when God offers them to us. But the most sublime destiny of all is that of saving men at the cost of sacrifices united to that of Christ Himself.

How do we bear ourselves in this rough way of sacrifice ? Does not our piety depend too much on our own tastes and inclinations ?

Are we ready to make sacrifices for souls, especially for those which God has brought near to us, in order that we may watch over their spiritual welfare, perhaps even that we may be the means of their conversion ?

III. THE SWEET CONDESCENSION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

1. With what high and lofty thoughts the Blessed Virgin was filled after the prophecy of Simeon ! Her first thought, doubtless, was to return home, there to meditate on this discourse,

so full of solemn mystery. If in these circumstances the interference of Anna, and her somewhat loud expressions of joy, were a little tiresome to her, Mary showed no sign of annoyance. She kept to herself her mission, and the prophecy of the sword, and graciously accepted the friendly demonstrations of the venerable prophetess.

2. This is the characteristic of spiritually-minded persons. They console others, they interest themselves in the troubles of all, they forget themselves for the sake of their neighbours, and only remember their own wants in the presence of God.

Have we any share of this noble generosity? Our ordinary conversations give us the opportunity to show it. Are we content to see the conversation directed to subjects which interest others rather than ourselves?

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask for a great and generous fervour, and for the spirit of unselfishness, that stamp of all true piety.

Ave Maria.

TWENTIETH DAY: THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The arrival of these rich strangers, who came from some idolatrous country of the East to prostrate themselves before a little Child and His Mother, is an example of human wisdom humbling itself before God, and should excite in our minds a true desire to do the work of an apostolate in His service. Our medita-

tion will be divided into three points: (1) The arrival of the Magi; (2) the impression produced on Mary; (3) the interview between the Magi and Mary.

MEDITATION.

"Intrantes domum, invenerunt puerum cum Maria matre ejus"—And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother (St. Matt. ii. 11).

First Prelude.—Certain rich men from the East, who have been vaguely expecting a royal liberator, recognize in the heavens the star which proclaimed His birth. They make their way to Judæa, and arrive at Jerusalem, where, from the priests assembled by Herod, they learn the birthplace of the Redeemer, and, guided by the mysterious light which had appeared to them in the East, they discover the house of the Holy Family. They enter, and find the Child with His Mother, and adore Him, offering at the same time rich presents. During their sleep they receive a message from Heaven, warning them to return to their country by another way.

Second Prelude.—Let us fix our thoughts on the house in which Mary and Joseph had established themselves after the birth of the Saviour.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray Our Lord through His Mother to give us humble hearts and apostolic zeal.

I. THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI AT BETHLEHEM.

1. The rich men have come. They have seen the sign of the Lord, and they find Jesus, but with

His Mother. The whole world is invited to seek and find Our Lord and His Mother—the Magi and the shepherds, the unbelieving and the representatives of the elect, the rich and great as well as the poor.

2. The Church does well in uniting devotion to Mary with devotion to Jesus in her instructions to the faithful and in her apostolic preaching. Let us imitate her; let us follow the Saints, who in preaching Jesus never forgot to assign a special part to Mary.

And for ourselves, let us never think that learning or riches can relieve us from the duty of seeking Jesus and Mary. If knowledge, fortune, and rank make a difference among men, these distinctions disappear in the sight of God, just as the distances, which on our planet appear so great, are reduced to a mere nothing in comparison with the immense space which separates us from the distant stars of the firmament. Before God we are all alike ignorant and insignificant, and we have all the same need to humble ourselves if we desire to obtain His favour. Look at the examples of the eminent men of the Church, from Ephrem and Augustine to Thomas and Suarez, Bossuet and Bourdaloue.

II. THE IMPRESSION WHICH THEIR ARRIVAL PRODUCED ON THE HEART OF MARY.

I. These men, who come from so far, confirm for Mary the prophecy of Simeon. Jesus is the Light of the Gentiles, as He is the Salvation of His people. But how few they are who come! and what of the others, the immense crowd of

them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death? Are we rash in ascribing to Mary a genuine compassion for the blindness of the human race, a compassion which dictates most fervent prayers on their behalf?

2. Vast countries are spread out before us, whose very existence was unknown a few centuries ago; and even in the Old World how many lands are there in which the worshippers of Jesus are scarcely more numerous than the Magi! Even in our midst how many there are who prefer darkness to light! Ought not every Christian to do the work of an Apostle? And do we take our share? Do we sufficiently impress upon young people, workmen, even on devout people, how much they can do in this great work?

III. THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE MAGI AND MARY.

1. The presents which the Magi offered to Jesus in such profusion were evidently given to His Mother. It was through her that they reached Our Lord. We can imagine the eager generosity with which these rich men drew from their treasures to honour Him, and the reverence and love with which they poured forth their offerings.

The Magi are the type of the rich men who are pleasing to God. They teach us that any homage paid to Mary has Jesus for its ultimate object, and that no pretext can excuse us from honouring Mary with Jesus, or going to Jesus through Mary.

2. In their journey and in all their actions the Magi were true to the light that was given them,

and God did not allow them to be deceived by the cunning of Herod. They were warned in a dream which way they should take to reach their country in safety. Thus, also, our own loyal obedience will gain for us the special protection of Providence.

COLLOQUY.

In our prayer at the end of this meditation let us speak to God of the many nations that are still to be converted, and offer ourselves, each according to his state, to work for their conversion, at least by our prayers and sacrifices, and let us ask Mary to obtain this grace for us.

Ave Maria.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY: THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In this meditation upon the flight into Egypt that trial will be considered as (1) *caused by Herod*; (2) *permitted by God*; (3) *endured by Mary*.

MEDITATION.

“Surge et accipe puerum et matrem ejus, et fuge in Ægyptum”—*Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt* (St. Matt. ii. 13).

First Prelude.—When Herod realized that the Magi would not return to him, the cruel despot, mad with rage, and intent on removing anything that might stand in his way, did not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of innocent victims. While he is sending

his assassins to put to death the little children of Bethlehem and the neighbourhood, an Angel awakens Joseph in the middle of the night, warns him of his danger, and orders him to fly into Egypt. The order is instantly obeyed.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the house of the Holy Family, and the sweet peace which reigns there at the moment when the Angel of God appears.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask a special grace, that we may understand better the dangers which beset us in our Christian life.

I. THE PERSECUTOR.

1. How quickly Simeon's prediction of the opposition to Jesus begins to be realized ! From His earliest infancy persecution rages against Him, and the cruel sword is plunged into Mary's heart.

Let us examine the cause of the persecution. It is the act of a proud and tyrannical monarch, who puts his own interests before every other consideration. His weapons are cunning and shameless cruelty.

2. Thus do pride and jealous ambition declare war against Christ and the Church. Lying and calumny at first, and, when they are hopeful of success, the use of open force, characterize the tactics of the enemy. We can see them at work before our eyes. We see a pretence of liberty, a pretence of equality, a pretence of philanthropy at first, and then, as soon as it is possible, violence and oppression, culminating in murders and summary executions, as witness the French Revolution, the

Commune, and the cruelties of certain contemporary strikes.

All this, far from discouraging us, has its consoling side. The weapons directed against the faith confirm its truth. They are a sort of indirect vindication of religion. Error is recognized by the very means it uses to gain its ends.

II. THE TRIAL.

I. We must observe that God does not multiply His miracles, and that He expects His creatures to act for themselves. The anger of Herod will have terrible results, and will cause innocent blood to be shed, and his hateful scheme will come very near to success. But God watches over the Holy Family, and at the critical moment provides for their safety.

II. 1. What lessons are we to learn from this working of the Providence of God? We must not remain inactive, and merely watch the progress of events. We must work as well as pray, for the result may depend on our own energy. But when we have done our duty, our whole duty, then we may leave the result to God. He watches over us, careful of all that affects our welfare.

2. The Holy Family represents the Church, often in danger, and yet always saved. Let us maintain our confidence in the midst of trouble, for our cause is sure of final triumph.

III. THE VIRTUE OF MARY.

I. We may observe the perfect submission of Mary to the designs of God. She is ever the

servant of the Lord, practising an obedience that is all the more admirable by reason of the circumstances. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the Divine will was made known, and Mary learned it only through Joseph.

2. If God always chose the moment that suited us to make known His will, if He addressed His command to us directly, we should have little trouble in acquiescing in His designs without delay and without reluctance ; but in our case also the great merit is in believing without having seen, in recognizing the hand of God in passing events and in the commands of lawful superiors, and in offering no resistance to His decrees when thus communicated to us.

COLLOQUY.

Let us endeavour to imitate the Blessed Virgin in her perfect submission to the will of God, and earnestly ask her for the grace to do so.

Ave Maria.

TWENTY-SECOND DAY : THE SOJOURN IN EGYPT.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt offers us an ideal picture of Christian life here on earth. For the true Christian the earth is what Egypt was for the Holy Family : (1) *A sojourn of exile* ; (2) *a sojourn of expectation* ; (3) *a sojourn consoled by Jesus*. These will be our three points,

MEDITATION.

“*Esto ibi, usque dum dicam tibi*”—*Be there until I shall tell thee* (St. Matt. ii. 13).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the house in which the Holy Family lived in a little town in Egypt.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray for the grace to live here on earth as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

I. EGYPT, A SOJOURN OF EXILE.

I. 1. Egypt was, indeed, for the Holy Family, and especially for Mary, a land of exile. Doubtless she found there other Jewish families devoted to the worship of Jehovah, but the great majority of the people spoke another language, worshipped false gods, and had entirely different habits and customs.

2. Fervent Christian families here similarly find themselves surrounded by a few others who share their faith and hope, but the outward atmosphere of the world is not really Christian. Most men are absorbed by the cares of this world; and to them they sacrifice their consciences without compunction. True piety is hated and misunderstood by men who are led away by their prejudices and passions. Even among priests and religious there are few who possess and practise the full fervour of supernatural life.

Do we feel this impression of being in exile? Do we understand the full pathos of that invocation in the *Salve Regina*, “To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve”?

II. 1. But this feeling, sad as it always is, did not discourage the Blessed Virgin. With constant cheerfulness she served her God, and devoted herself to her neighbour.

2. The opposition of the world and public opinion should never tempt anyone to give up his work and retire discouraged. The Christian must remain at his post, to be the salt of a corrupt world and the light of a generation that has lost its way. All his efforts should be directed to elevating the minds and hearts of those around him.

II. EGYPT, A SOJOURN OF EXPECTATION.

I. Mary was always mindful of the words which the Angel had said to Joseph: "Be there until I shall tell thee."

1. This recollection produced in her a perfect detachment from the things around her. House, occupations, relations, were not allowed to attach her too closely to them. She was always ready to leave them, and go where God directed her.

2. The uncertainty of the time of her return enabled her to make an act of complete submission to the Divine Will. When will our time come? In a few days, or after long waiting? As God wills. In the meantime, let us do the duties of each day as well as we can. That was the constant rule of our holy Mother.

II. We must make the same rule for ourselves. "Be there, until I shall tell thee." Is not this the Divine order which regulates our sojourn on the earth? God does not guarantee us a single day of life. "Show me, if you can," said St. Augus-

tine, "a single text in which you can find any such promise." And did not St. Paul recommend the Christians of his day "that they that use this world should be as if they used it not"? (1 Cor. vii. 31). How wise we should be if we followed this counsel, and so gained a perfect detachment from the things of the world! We ought to be so perfectly submissive to the Will of God that we are neither impatient for the end to come, nor grieved if it comes sooner than we expected.

III. EGYPT, AN EXILE CONSOLED BY JESUS.

1. A son is enough to occupy the attention of his mother, and to comfort her in all her troubles. How much more, then, did the possession of Jesus make Mary exclaim, "I am filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation"! (2 Cor. vii. 4). This joy had a double cause. Mary was happy in possessing Jesus, but she had also the joy of serving Him, and making Him the object of her tenderest solicitude.

2. Such consolations are the reward of the true Christian. He possesses Jesus in his heart by grace, by Holy Communion. He finds Him in the Church when he goes to visit Him. His whole life is devoted, as Mary's was, to the service of Jesus. This is the best use we can make of our time—to give it entirely to Him "Who alone shall continue" (Heb. i. 11). What, then, to us is success or failure, fame or obscurity? "He must increase, but we must decrease" (St. John iii. 30).

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask Mary to offer for us to Jesus the holy resolutions that we make to serve Him better.

Ave Maria.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY: THE RETURN FROM EGYPT.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We have already seen how this mystery of persecution and exile shows us exactly the characteristic features of a truly Christian life. The history of the return of the Holy Family to their own country completes the picture. We shall consider (1) *the recall*; (2) *the return of the Holy Family*; and (3) *the conduct of Mary* in all the circumstances of the recall and the return.

MEDITATION.

“*Accipe puerum et matrem ejus, et vade in terram Israel*”—*Take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel* (St. Matt. ii. 20).

First Prelude.—It is, again, the middle of the night when the Angel informs Joseph of the death of Herod, adding the express command to return into the land of Israel without delay. But, fearing the hostility of Archelaus, one of the sons of Herod, Joseph deliberates on the course to be pursued, and asks for the guidance of God. Being warned in sleep, he returns to Galilee, and settles down again at Nazareth.

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine the humble

house in which the Holy Family were living in Egypt, and then the road to the land of Israel.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask the grace of perfect submission to the will of God.

I. THE RECALL.

I. 1. Is it not surprising at first sight that the new message should be sent to Joseph during his sleep, although there was no urgency, and some time had already elapsed since the death of the persecutor? The Angel had not hastened, it seems, to announce the event which had rendered it possible for them to return. Why, then, should they not return at their leisure? Yet the Holy Family were not permitted to delay. "Arise, take the Child and His Mother"—just as when there was a question of escaping from the Massacre of the Innocents. Joseph obeys instantly without a murmur.

2. Let us admire this prompt obedience, and try to understand the reason of it. God, Who is Master of His gifts, dispenses them according to His will. "The Spirit breatheth where He will" (St. John iii. 8), and when He will. Our duty is to obey His inspirations, and to find in His command the most urgent of all reasons for action. To delay our obedience would be to expose ourselves to the risk of losing the opportunity which God offers us of obtaining some great good or avoiding some great misfortune.

II. Joseph had nothing to attach him to Egypt, and he readily obeyed the call of God. Do we wish to be free? Let us fulfil the condition re-

quired, complete detachment. Let us examine ourselves whether our ready obedience is hindered by any attachment to persons or things, or whether we are always ready to do the will of God. If we allow things here to stand in our way, it is always to our own detriment.

II. THE RETURN.

1. Joseph obeys the order with promptitude, but without undue precipitation. In spite of the supernatural voice which he has heard, he makes use of his reason, and takes time to deliberate. Far from displeasing God, this prudence of the foster-father of Jesus obtained for him new light, and led to the fulfilment of the prophecy that Christ should be called a Nazarene (St. Matt. ii. 23).

2. Let us consider well this wise dispensation of Providence. God, Who is the Author of nature as well as of grace, does not lead us by paths in which we have no need to use our own faculties. We do not cease to be obedient because we make use of our reason in respect of the counsels of God. The contrary error has led men into all kinds of extravagances. To give up using our own intelligence is to refuse our active co-operation with grace, and to choose the easy path of idleness.

III. THE CONDUCT OF MARY.

1. Mary seems to have no part in all this mystery. She is content to follow her husband, and obey. And, indeed, it is Joseph, and not Mary, who receives the message from on high. Let us remark, then, that such favours as do not lead us to any

increase of holiness are not distributed according to the merit of each recipient, but adapted to the duty which each has to fulfil.

2. Consequently, our trust in the direction of our lawful Superiors, and our docility in submission, should not be measured by our opinion of their merits. While they have the right to command, we could not be more assured that we are doing the will of God than by carrying out faithfully and loyally the orders they give us. This does not mean that God miraculously preserves them from all error ; though false tactics may cause battles to be lost occasionally, yet want of discipline in the soldiers is much more mischievous. And in the spiritual order, the error of a Superior cannot take from obedience the merit which leads to the enjoyment of eternal happiness.

COLLOQUY.

Let us ask for the spirit of faith which is necessary for this docile and perfect obedience. Let us ask Joseph and Mary to obtain for us, and Jesus to grant us, a life inspired by the same principles as those which governed the Holy Family in the mystery of the flight into Egypt.

Ave Maria.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY: THE HIDDEN LIFE OF OUR SAVIOUR.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—We are about to direct our attention to the first thirty years of Our Lord's life on earth—that is to say, by far the

longer portion of that existence. Those years were passed in such silence and such obscurity that a rapid glance is sufficient. But the few simple words in which the Evangelist sums them up form an inexhaustible subject of meditation for the faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. They contain the grand teaching of the whole of Our Blessed Lord's life, the unchangeable rule of conduct laid down for redeemed humanity. The distinctive characteristic of Our Lord is there brought into great prominence. He is *meek and humble of heart*. Having looked at our Model, we shall turn our attention to the Blessed Virgin, and divide our meditation on the hidden life at Nazareth into three parts: (1) *Mary commands Jesus*; (2) *Mary contemplates Jesus*; (3) *Mary is loved and served by Jesus*.

MEDITATION.

"Et erat subditus illis"—*And He was subject to them* (St. Luke ii. 51).

First Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the modest dwelling in which the God made man shows us the wonderful spectacle of His submission to Mary and Joseph.

Second Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray that our hearts may be so disposed as to resemble the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

I. MARY COMMANDS JESUS.

I. Two wonderful things are here offered for our consideration—the obedience of Jesus and the authority of Mary.

1. *The Obedience of Jesus*.—(a) Infinite Power and Wisdom does not disdain to profess subjection to a creature. Jesus consents to grow in years with all the consequences, all the duties, of the different ages of man. The child owes obedience to his parents, and as a Child He is willing to obey.

(b) Here is an eloquent example to show us that there is nothing degrading in our obedience to lawful Superiors, an example which should enable us to overcome the reluctance that arises from self-love or vanity. Let us give a willing and loyal assent to this law of submission.

2. *The Authority of Mary*.—(a) Is it possible to imagine a more delicate task than that of assuming authority over the Person to Whom one owes the homage of the most profound adoration? The thought of her own lowliness must have filled Mary with confusion every time she gave Him an order. For her to exercise authority was an excellent practice in humility.

How did she succeed in performing so difficult a task? By the clear knowledge that she had of the power conferred upon her by God, and her obligation to exercise that power; by great simplicity in the command; and by putting away all thought of pride or self-satisfaction.

(b) These are the dispositions which should animate all Superiors according to the mind of God. No one, of himself, has the right to command another. The authority comes from God. It is conferred on man, not in consideration of his own merits, but for the benefit of subordinates and the general community. Clothed with this authority as with a garment lent to him for a time,

man should use it simply without arrogance and without timidity, without pride, and solely with the desire to please that God from Whom all authority is derived. A good Superior often finds reason to feel abashed at having to give orders to others more worthy than himself.

Such is the obligation of either public or private authority, and power so understood is the perfection of humility.

II. MARY CONTEMPLATES JESUS.

1. What a privilege it was for Mary to live in the closest familiarity with the Saviour of men ! The Gospel, it is true, tells us nothing of what she felt in her soul ; but can we doubt the consolation she experienced by the side of Jesus, and the pious eagerness with which she profited by His Divine example ? Careful as she was to keep in her heart every word spoken concerning Jesus, with how much more care must she have kept the words of Jesus Himself ! How the least actions of this perfect Model were impressed upon her heart, to become the object of the most perfect imitation ! How happy, how blessed was Mary during all these years ! How much edified by the example of Jesus !

2. Such happiness as Mary enjoyed does not fall to our lot. Yet (a) attentive and continual meditation on Jesus is a source of light and sanctification. We may say that Jesus manifests Himself to all who desire seriously to contemplate Him in order to take Him as their Model. Do we endeavour to do this in our meditations ? Is not

our weariness in mental prayer caused by the fact that we do not hunger and thirst after Jesus Christ, after that justice which alone can satisfy us? (b) The Saints and holy men whom we know in all their virtues remind us of Jesus. Do we seek their company for our own edification? As a holy emulation is the fulfilment of Our Lord's most cherished desire, so jealousy and envy are utterly opposed to His Spirit.

III. MARY LOVED AND SERVED BY JESUS.

1. Can we hesitate to believe and proclaim this truth? The Author of the Fourth Commandment was an incomparable Son. What grateful affection He, Who was always so tender towards His disciples and towards sinners, must have felt for His own parents! Certainly He did not allow this affection to interfere with His public mission, but even while He fulfilled that duty He was the best of Sons.

2. Let us beware of a spiritual austerity, which in its exaggerated expression seems to misunderstand altogether the obligations of filial piety. This, far from being a mark of perfection, is not even a virtue. Good faith and good intentions may excuse much, but the appearance of religion serves sometimes to cover that selfishness which Our Lord detested and condemned. People will often shirk trouble under pretence of needing time for recollection, and one who professes to disregard earthly relationships will blush at the modesty of his own origin. Although we must always put the service of God before the consolation of our neigh-

bours, we may and we must keep in our hearts a sentiment of filial piety which is ready to show itself on every occasion. True piety, moreover, ordinarily puts no obstacle in the way of the generous sacrifices or the painful separations which the glory of God demands. The affection which discourages such sacrifices is liable to the suspicion of selfishness ; it is afraid only of its own suffering. Pure disinterested affection, inspired by the love of God, is free from these dangers. Let us pray for our parents ; let us endeavour to please them, and render them every service in our power.

COLLOQUY.

Let us contemplate the beautiful spectacle of the home at Nazareth, in which Jesus is subject to Mary and Joseph, and pray that we may pass our days in such an atmosphere of mutual love.

Ave Maria.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY : JESUS LOST AND FOUND.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—The conduct of Mary, after she had lost Jesus without any fault of her own, should serve as an example to those who, more unhappy than she, have voluntarily banished Jesus from their hearts. Mary reveals her feelings in the words which she addresses to Jesus when she has found Him, and the result appears in the consolation she experiences in that happy moment. *Dolentes quærebarum te.* Each

of these three words will form a point in this meditation ; the joy of finding Jesus will be the subject of a fourth point.

MEDITATION.

“Dolentes quærebaramus te”—*We have sought Thee sorrowing* (St. Luke ii. 48).

First Prelude.—Mary and Joseph had just made their annual visit to Jerusalem for the solemn Feast of the Pasch. Jesus, no doubt, had accompanied them for the first time, having reached the legal age of twelve years. On their return, on the evening of the first day, they perceived that Jesus was not among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. Without a moment's delay they returned with anxious hearts to Jerusalem, where on the third day they had the happiness to find Him in the Temple, sitting among the Doctors. “Son,” asked the Blessed Virgin, “why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.”

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine this long journey which Joseph and Mary had to undertake in a state of terrible anxiety ; then the Temple, and the assembly of Doctors among whom Jesus was found.

Third Prelude.—Let us pray for the grace to understand how far above all price is the possession of Jesus, that we may never again be so unhappy as to lose Him by our own fault. If we have lost Him, let us pray that we may seek Him diligently until we find Him.

I. "DOLENTES"—SORROWING.

I. 1. Who can describe the anguish felt by the holy parents of Jesus when, on the evening of the first day of their return towards Nazareth, they discovered the absence of Our Lord, and when all their inquiries were fruitless? They had nothing to reproach themselves with, but Jesus was lost. Nothing could replace Him in their affections, or even distract their attention from their misfortune. Their hearts bled; their grief was measured by their love.

2. How deplorable is the conduct of those who, led astray by pride or covetousness, voluntarily shut out Jesus from their hearts!

Sad, too, is that voluntary lukewarmness which allows an energetic fervour to degenerate into listless indolence.

Both these faults are due to the weakness of our poor human nature.

But what is most to be regretted is the little regret that we feel for our shortcomings. This cold indifference proves that our blindness is not cured; and, what is more grievous, it proves that there are more falls to come after. When we are humbled by sorrow and penitence, then alone can we rise purified to rejoice in the hope of eternal life.

After any grave fault of omission or commission let us renew our expressions of sorrow, let us accept the healing medicine of penance. Sorrow for sin, if but little felt, does not suffice for conversion; if deeply felt, it makes men Saints.

II. "QUÆREBAMUS"—WE HAVE SOUGHT

1. Mary and Joseph did not content themselves with verbal expressions of sorrow. Without a moment's loss they decided what they must do. They must commence the search at once, no matter what trouble or fatigue or privation the search entailed upon them.

2. With us, our regrets are often useless, because words are not followed by acts of generosity and perseverance. No object is so worthy of all our efforts as our eternal happiness, and there is none for which men are so sparing of ways and means. Sinners complain that they cannot get rid of their bad habits, but, when they are asked, they cannot tell you of anything they have done to avoid the occasions of sin, to cast away the cause of their offence, to humble themselves, and to increase the fervour of their prayers to the Author of grace.

Priests and religious complain that they grow languid, and lose their zeal; but what do they try to do? Do they make any effort at all?

Ah, if we strove after purity and sanctification really, and not merely in appearance, how quickly we should attain our object! "It is not so much time," said Father Olivaint, "as courage which is wanted to make a Saint."

III. "TE"—THEE.

1. All their searching was for Jesus, for Jesus alone. Neither Mary nor Joseph had any thought of personal satisfaction, not even to clear themselves from the imputation of carelessness,

2. Our sorrow for sin is not always felt for God's sake, but for our own. We feel the shame of another fall, we are humiliated at the sight of our own fickleness, we are grieved by the consequences which we have to suffer in health and reputation ; but we are afraid of the trouble of beginning afresh, of the dullness of religious life. Our own selfishness and our own cowardice are the cause of our fall, and of the discouragement which follows it.

Let us take care, then, that no self-love is permitted to lessen the value of our repentance. When we have the misfortune to lose Jesus, would it not be the height of folly and ingratitude not to seek Him for His own sake ? It would be a fatal error to let discouragement prevent us from doing our best.

IV. JESUS FOUND—THE RESULT OF THE SEARCH.

1. What pure joy did the Blessed Virgin feel on finding Jesus again ! Let us take part in her joy, but let us remember also that this joy was all the greater because Mary had tired herself out in looking for her Son.

2. It is the same with our own reconciliation to Our Lord. The lukewarm scarcely feel the joy, but for those who have taken trouble to find Him the meeting is one of ineffable sweetness.

COLLOQUY.

Let us lament our indifference, and promise Jesus fidelity and fervour in future, and let us ask His Mother to obtain for us these precious graces.

Ave Maria,

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY: THE TEACHING OF
JESUS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—A solemn scene is offered for our contemplation. Jesus, Son of Mary, shows Himself also as Son of God, and His words contain a great lesson, which He does not hesitate to give us in spite of the sorrow which it will cause His Mother. Let us thank Him for His generosity, and respond to His advances by turning to account this important lesson. We shall consider (1) the *question put by Mary*; (2) the *answer of Jesus*; and (3) the *manner in which Mary received this answer*.

MEDITATION.

“In his quæ Patris mei sunt oportet me esse”—*I must be about My Father’s business* (St. Luke ii. 49).

First Prelude.—In her joy at finding her Son again, the Mother of Jesus tells Him by her first pathetic words of the terrible anxiety through which she has just passed. “Son,” she says, “why hast Thou done this to us? Behold, Thy Father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.” And Jesus answers her: “How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” The Evangelist adds that Mary and Joseph understood not the word that He spoke to them. Yet not a word was lost. Mary kept them all in her heart. And Jesus, restored to His parents, advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the

Temple and the assembly of Doctors in which this dialogue took place.

Third Prelude.—Let us ask Our Lord to give us the grace to understand these sublime words, and to frame our lives in perfect conformity with them.

I. THE QUESTION OF MARY.

1. "*Son, why hast Thou done so to us ?*" These words might be interpreted as a reproach if Jesus were not perfection itself, and if Mary were ignorant of the dignity and the mission of her Son. Far be it from us to assign to the words any such false meaning, which is not necessarily implied by the text, and is clearly excluded by the circumstances. The words are a simple question, the natural language of a loving Mother, who in her present happiness thinks of the sorrow and fear that are past.

2. The words, then, show the tenderness of the Mother's heart restored to happiness after the pain of losing her Son. They show the beautiful familiarity existing between them. Such sayings are met with in the lives of the Saints. God allows their questions and their lamentations because there is no bitterness in them. What a difference there is between the extreme gentleness with which they seem, as it were, to reproach their Heavenly Father for the delay in answering their prayers and the tone of querulousness and discouragement with which lukewarm Christians complain that they are never heard !

3. Let us act naturally with God, but without ever failing in our duty of perfect humility.

II. THE ANSWER OF JESUS.

I. The answer of Jesus bears a double meaning—first, as addressed to His Mother ; and, secondly, as addressed to us.

1. *Towards His Mother.*—The answer is explained not by coldness or indifference, but by the absolute priority of the love of God over all other affection. Mary is to Jesus more than any other mother to her son, but Mary disappears before His Father Who is in Heaven. The thought of Him absorbs every other thought ; the love of the Heavenly Father overshadows every other affection.

2. *Towards Us.*—Jesus intends to make us understand the infinite right that God has over us, and over everything that seems to belong to us. He teaches us that no consideration can—I will not say prevail over the will of God, but even be put in comparison with it. He teaches us to unite a great love with firm resolution and perfect independence in the service of God. *Pater cælestis*—Our Heavenly Father ! In comparison with Him, no other can be called father, or have any rights whatever.

II. This is a great and necessary lesson, which the Saints learned so well, but which so many parents and so many children have still to learn. Have we learned it and followed it ? Let us not forget that if we are sometimes obliged for God's sake to refuse to listen to the tender pleadings of those who have some claim upon us, we have much more reason to reject the advice of worldly friends, and to put aside all consideration of our own selfish interests,

III. MARY'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE ANSWER.

1. Mary does not take offence at these words. They come from Him Who has the right and the power to teach her. On the contrary, she keeps them all in the precious casket of her heart. And the blessing which she gains thereby is Jesus, submitting readily to her and Joseph—the peaceful possession of Jesus, the sight of His advance in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men.

2. Let us be faithful in hearing and keeping the word of God, and we shall gather excellent fruits from it. Better than mere transitory pleasure, we shall gain for our parents and our friends the benefit and consolation of that more perfect, more generous virtue, the spirit of self-sacrifice ; and we ourselves shall advance rapidly in the sight of God, and for the spiritual advantage of our neighbour. In us and in others it is Jesus Who will grow ; for every Christian is another Christ. When he perfects himself, it is Jesus Who grows in him. “ My little children,” says the Apostle (Gal. iv. 19), “ of whom I am in labour again until Christ be formed in you.”

COLLOQUY.

Let us fervently ask of Mary and Jesus the great secret how to show ourselves strong and virtuous, that we may advance spiritually ourselves, and be an occasion of true progress for others. If human affections stand in the way of our holy desires, let us pray Jesus to remove this obstacle in ourselves and in those whom we love.

Ave Maria.

FIFTH SECTION

THE PUBLIC LIFE

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY : THE WEDDING
AT CANA.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—In some respects it is harder to bear success than misfortune. The page of the Gospel which records the story of the wedding at Cana furnishes us with matter for useful reflections on the manner in which we should behave on legitimate occasions of joy in this world, and in the first miracle of the public life of Our Lord we see the estimation in which the Blessed Virgin was held. We have thus a twofold reason for considering with attention the scene which St. John describes for us. We shall take for the three points of our meditation (1) *the presence of Jesus and Mary at the marriage-feast*; (2) *the kindness of Mary*; (3) *the miracle which was worked at her request*.

MEDITATION.

“*Dixit Mater Jesu ad eum, vinum non habent*”
—*The Mother of Jesus saith to Him, They have no wine* (St. John ii. 3).

First Prelude.—Jesus had been invited to a marriage, at which Mary also was present. In the course of the feast the wine failed. Mary informed Jesus of this, and Jesus said to her: “Woman, what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come.” Mary said to the waiters:

“Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.” By order of Jesus six jars were filled with water, and carried to the chief steward of the feast, and the guests tasted a wine better than had been served to them before. This was the first miracle of Jesus, and it confirmed the faith of His disciples.

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine the hall of the marriage-feast, where Jesus sat with His disciples.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray for the grace to pass through the joys of this life as we pass through its troubles.

I. THE MARRIAGE-FEAST.

I. 1. Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin are present at the marriage-feast of Cana. Marriage is always and everywhere an occasion of rejoicing. In the union of two souls mankind recognizes a touching symbol of the union which should exist among all men, and as the result of the union we hope for the assurance that our name may be continued through our descendants beyond the years of our own mortal life. Thus, marriage satisfies a double desire—the desire to survive, and the desire to be united. By marriage the race is preserved; by marriage a man emerges from his solitude, and becomes a centre of union.

2. Let us consider our own instinctive longing for things that do not pass away. Do we wish to have our full share of happiness here below? Let us give up all care for transitory pleasures, and labour to promote unity. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” says Our Lord (St. Matt. v. 9).

II. 1. The presence of Jesus and Mary at the

feast was probably the natural result of some relationship with the family of the bride or the bridegroom.

It is quite consistent with the highest virtue to fulfil our social duties, to keep up the relations which are required by our position, rank, or circumstances.

But in going to this feast, neither Jesus nor Mary sought mere pleasure or amusement. We should not dare to attribute to the God-man or His Mother a desire for delicate food, or boisterous gaiety, or the allurements of dissipation.

2. The truly spiritual man takes the recreation which is necessary for him, but he does not live for it ; he does not even run after it. While the marriage-feast at Cana should simply warn us against being unsociable, and so offending our neighbours, we must not make of it an excuse for inordinate gaiety or sensuality, for sensual we should surely be if we took delight in pleasures which are inconsistent with our profession, or if we were so much attached to those which are permissible as to neglect our duty, or err by excess.

II. THE KINDNESS OF MARY.

1. How thoughtful is the charity of Mary ! There is only a question of a slight inconvenience. No one has asked her help, but she has remarked the embarrassment of the members of the family, she has heard the whispered consultations, and before long she has learned the cause of the trouble, and sets herself to remove it.

2. All authors warn us of the dangers of wealth,

of abundance, of prosperity, of outward pleasure, and yet God has placed in the midst of all feasts an incorruptible guardian of virtue and holiness—that is, charity.

Go to feasts for your own satisfaction, and you make yourself a slave, and come away with your heart unsatisfied still ; but go in order to make yourself agreeable to others, to be obliging, to enable others to forget for a time the cares and troubles of existence ; go with a pure intention of charity, and you will gather merit by going, you will do good to others, and will come away without regret, enjoying the satisfaction of your own unselfish behaviour. How few men understand what is true wisdom, in spite of the daily warnings of experience !

III. THE MIRACLE.

1. Mary expressed a secret desire. The answer of Our Lord showed that her request created a certain difficulty, and that it was in some respects inopportune. If Mary had not interfered, Our Lord would not have worked this miracle. But it was wrought, and the Evangelist lays stress on the fact that it was the first wrought by Our Lord. What touching consideration He shows to His Mother ! For a time He seems to forget her, but from the beginning He has determined that His first miracle, the miracle which is to confirm the faith of His disciples, shall be wrought at her intercession. What a striking proof of the power of Mary !

2. The kindness of Mary and the power of her prayers should inspire us with the fullest confidence.

COLLOQUY.

Let us tell our dear Mother of all our wants, and beg her help to obtain what is good for us.

Ave Maria.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY: MARY DURING THE
PUBLIC LIFE OF OUR LORD.

INTRODUCTION.

REMARKS ON CERTAIN SAYINGS OF OUR LORD.—
In the course of His public life Our Lord made use of expressions which, if not properly understood, would seem wanting in respect to the Blessed Virgin, and would not be in keeping with the loving-kindness of Jesus or the merit of His holy Mother. But in their true sense these words are consistent with the most tender and lofty sentiments of the human heart.

This harmony is not difficult to find if we pay attention to the following considerations :

I. An expression which would be offensive in our own language may be entirely deprived of that character in the language used by Our Lord. Such is especially the case with the word *woman*, which He made use of on one or two occasions during His public life when He wished to avoid using the word *Mother* ; but the word was quite appropriate in addressing persons of whatever rank, even those to whom it was desired to show the highest respect. The same is the case with the expression, “ What is it to Me and to thee ? ” The meaning of the phrase is not very clear, but it is certain, from the

circumstances in which we see it used in Scripture, that it can mean nothing more than a certain difference of opinion, a certain importunity, and a person could use the expression in addressing his best friends.

2. The meaning and effect of words depend often entirely on the tone in which they are spoken. Thus, the words, "How is it that you sought Me?" if used in an impatient and reproachful manner, might seem extremely harsh; while the same words, uttered in a tone of affectionate authority, could not possibly hurt or surprise us, coming from the lips of Jesus.

3. Let us not forget that Our Lord, if He was the Son of Mary, was equally her God, her Redeemer. If He condescended to be subject to her during His childhood, He had during His riper years to accomplish the mission which He had received from His Heavenly Father. Moreover, Mary, though without sin, was nevertheless able to grow in knowledge, and therefore to receive advice and direction. The divinity of Christ authorized the use of language from which mere humanity would, perhaps, have refrained.

4. In His public life Our Lord appears more tender and more thoughtful towards strangers and sinners than towards His Mother. This difference of attitude gives us reason to admire His condescension to us, but not to be offended at His conduct towards the Blessed Virgin. No one could doubt His filial devotion towards His Mother, which had been shown a thousand times during His hidden life; but His affection for us ungrateful sinners needed to be demonstrated by evidence

which no one could reject. Our Lord, in giving us this evidence of His love, showed Himself infinitely tender towards us, while His reserve towards His Mother was a tribute to her virtue and her faith.

5. Finally, the acts which followed the words remove all suspicion of harshness or disrespect, and the words themselves contain an indirect praise of Mary. After He had said, "How is it that you sought Me?" Jesus, according to the testimony of the Evangelist, went down to Nazareth with His Mother, and was humbly subject to her. In spite of the phrase, "What is it to Me and to thee?" He immediately granted Mary's unspoken request; and when He said, "My Mother and My brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it" (St. Luke viii. 21), or when He exalted the blessedness of being faithful disciples of His word above that of being physically His Mother (St. Luke xi. 28), He revealed to us that wonderful correspondence with grace which prepared Mary for her Divine maternity, and gave her in Heaven a glory and a happiness suitable to her sublime election. Does not the Evangelist himself, in the passages which we have been considering, put into strong relief the faithfulness of Mary in keeping the words of God in her heart?

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—After this introduction, we shall easily understand how the study of the relations between Our Lord and His Mother reveals to us (1) *a great lesson given by Our Lord*; (2) *a great sacrifice made by Mary*; (3) *a great praise of Mary*.

MEDITATION.

"Mater mea et fratres mei, hi sunt qui verbum Dei audiunt et faciunt"—My Mother and My brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it (St. Luke viii. 21).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the words which we have just quoted and explained.

Second Prelude.—Let us imagine Our Lord surrounded by His disciples, pronouncing this oracular speech: "Who are My Mother and My brethren? They who hear the word of God, and do it."

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly pray for the great grace to give to God that which is due to Him in our lives and in our hearts.

I. THE GREAT TEACHING OF OUR LORD.

I. Instead of lingering over vain objections, and remarking what Our Lord seems to refuse to Mary, let us consider the tribute that He offers to God, His Father. If it was necessary to give us an example of filial submission and human goodness, it was much more necessary for Him to teach us our obligations to God. Indeed, Our Lord gives us the most striking proof that in His eyes everything must give way before His Father and the Divine mission which His Father had entrusted to Him. The Divine paternity overshadows the human maternity; His Father's business puts into the background all earthly affairs.

II. How opportune was this important lesson!

I. In our own day there are many men who profess entire indifference in religious matters, and

claim to pass for persons without reproach, because they have never done any material harm to their neighbours. They have never bowed the head or bent the knee before God. Let us refuse to admire this imperfect virtue, which neglects the first of all duties—our duty towards God—and ignores the essential position of man—that of a creature in presence of his Creator.

2. Children called by God to a more perfect life allow themselves to be kept back by the fear of distressing their parents. This plea, which is the most honourable of all, cannot be accepted as a valid excuse. Jesus Christ formally rejected it when He refused to allow one of His disciples first to go and bury his father. God has claims on us before men.

3. There are even priests and religious who allow themselves to be turned aside from the perfect service of God by human reasons which ought never to be taken into consideration.

II. THE GREAT SACRIFICE OF MARY.

I. In leaving His Mother, and putting her, as it were, into the background, Our Lord treated her as in the course of ages He will treat all great souls. He exacted the accomplishment of the sacrifice to which Mary had consented. She had been willing to be the Mother of the Saviour of men ; she had offered Him as such for the salvation of the world. The holocaust must now be completed that she may have all the merit of it, and thereby obtain the honour of being associated with her Son in the work of redemption.

Let us consider. Mary could not be in any way associated in the active preaching of Jesus ; her sex forbade that. The part which she could take in the work of redemption was to share and to feel the sacrifice. This part Our Lord wholly reserves to her, and we find that put prominently before us in the Gospel. Mary is expressly mentioned at the moment when the offering is made at the birth of Jesus and His presentation in the Temple, and at the moment when the sacrifice is consummated on Calvary.

II. 1. What an eloquent example for parents ! Too many love and educate their children with a view solely to their personal advantage. If they would only overcome this purely selfish attachment, they would have a share in the merit of all the sacrifices which they permit and help their children to make for the great cause of Christ and of souls.

2. What a lesson for ourselves ! Let us never complain if we are led by the rough way of sacrifice. It is the way of the chosen ones of God.

III. THE HONOUR DONE TO MARY.

I. The action of Our Lord assures to His Mother a manifold honour.

1. Mary finds herself in this manner associated in the work of redemption. If Jesus had treated her after the manner of men, she would have lost in the participation of the greatest of all works what she would have gained in mere temporary consolation.

2. Our Lord implicitly honours the virtue of

His Mother by showing that He considers her capable of bearing the trial of such treatment.

3. The words of Our Lord draw our attention to the actual merit of the Blessed Virgin—a merit which, without putting into the shade the sublime prerogative of the Divine maternity, was to be united to it to render that prerogative useful and fruitful. It is a solemn truth that even the dignity of the Mother of God would have been of little value if the Blessed Virgin had not at the same time shown her entire submission to the Divine Will, and her faithfulness in hearing the word of God and doing it.

II. While we congratulate Mary, we shall learn by her perfect example not to esteem ourselves according to our rank, our position, or our dignity, exalted though they may be, but according to our fulfilment of the duty, which is common to all men, of being perfectly submissive to God.

COLLOQUY.

Our prayer, in conclusion, will give us the opportunity to acknowledge our foolish vanity and all our past errors, and to make a generous offering of sacrifice to God. Let us ask Our Lord at the same time, by the self-renunciation of His holy Mother, to give us the grace to live wholly to God, heroically faithful to the mission He has assigned us.

Ave Maria.

SIXTH SECTION

THE SUFFERING LIFE

TWENTY-NINTH DAY: THE BLESSED VIRGIN
AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—After having been, as it were, forgotten during the public life of our Saviour, Mary reappears at the supreme moment of the sacrifice of the Cross. She is there, brave in her immense sorrow. Her Son sees her, and in His heart, already full of suffering, He finds room still for pity and compassion for His Mother. At the moment of His last farewell He looks for someone to take His place at her side. To whom shall He better entrust this precious duty than to His beloved disciple? “Woman,” He says to Mary, “behold thy son,” indicating St. John; and to St. John He says, “Behold thy Mother.” How touching was this act, putting St. John in His place! He Who is about to enter into His glory will cease to be on earth the Son of Mary. “Woman,” He says, not “Mother.” But he to whom the charge of His Mother is entrusted becomes the object of a new love. He is no longer a stranger to her; he is called her son.

We, too, disciples of Jesus like St. John, and, like him, redeemed by the sufferings of the same Saviour, are equally bound to show Mary the sentiments and devotion of filial affection. The first duty imposed upon St. John was to share in the sorrows of Mary. We shall fulfil this duty by a

pious meditation, in which we shall consider (1) the *cruel martyrdom suffered by Mary* ; (2) the *wonderful courage she displayed* ; and (3) the *glorious reward she merited thereby*.

MEDITATION.

“ *Stabant juxta crucem Jesu mater ejus, et soror matris ejus, Maria Cleophæ, et Maria Magdalene* ”
—*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene* (St. John xix. 25).

First Prelude.—Let us represent to ourselves Calvary, Jesus on the Cross, and at the foot of the Cross Mary and St. John at the moment when Christ pronounces the words, “ *Ecce Mater tua* ” —“ Behold thy Mother ! ”

Second Prelude.—Let us ask for the grace to feel within us the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin, that we may love her better and imitate her in her courage and her virtues.

I. THE IMMENSITY OF MARY'S SORROW.

I. The suffering of Mary is all the suffering of Jesus reflected in the most loving and most tender of hearts. Let us recall to mind all the sufferings of Jesus during His last agony—all the wounds which cover His body, the nails which pierce His hands and His feet, the fire with which His head is burning, and the deadly thirst which parches His throat—and let us say the heart of Mary is enduring all that, is struck by that suffering more than the earth is struck by each ray of the sun. Let us recall all the humiliations of Jesus on the

Cross—the blasphemies, the cries of hatred, the insults and the mockings—and let us say, all that is found in the heart of Mary. Let us remember the utter sadness of the soul of Jesus—the sickness, the terror, the bitter grief—and let us say, again, all that was felt by the heart of Mary. O Mary, what agony was thine!

2. All this was in Mary because she is a Mother indeed, but also because she sees in these sufferings the price of her own redemption. For this last reason these same sufferings of Jesus ought to be impressed still more upon us, who have to recognize in them the effect not only of the sin of Adam, but also of our own sins.

If this suffering were deeply engraved upon our hearts, what a healing influence it would have over them! It would put us on our guard against breaking by sin the sacred covenant sealed by that precious blood, and it would give us a generous courage to suffer and make atonement for our sins. But a passing glance is not enough. The farther we are from the time and the scene of this agony, the more intensely should we concentrate our attention upon it. Let us, then, in this meditation, take care to think of all the details of the passion till we so realize them as to feel that we bear in ourselves the image of the Man of Sorrows.

II. THE COURAGE OF MARY.

1. *Stabat Mater*. The Mother of Jesus stood there. Mary at the foot of the Cross was a perfect model of heroic fortitude. We may fail under

suffering in three ways, but Mary won three glorious victories. Suffering gains the victory over us when it produces in us either impatience, or discouragement, or a desire for revenge. But Mary was strong in every respect—brave under God by the entire submission of her will, brave towards men by the generosity of a pardon which went so far as to enable them to benefit by her sufferings, brave in herself by her constancy in all her duties.

2. Let us consider the three ways in which we may fail under suffering. We fail if we are discouraged by our afflictions, or if we are carried away by anger or indignation, for thus we give way to our passions. Let us endeavour to exercise a command over ourselves which by the grace of God will lead us to victory.

III. THE GLORIOUS REWARD OF MARY.

1. That God Who permitted so much suffering is a God full of love. He saw that Mother's heart, saturated with such bitter sorrow, and He willed that it should be filled with eternal delights. That heart came bravely through the trial, and when the hour of sorrow was passed the honour of reward succeeded. "O blessed passion of Christ!" says the Church; and we may add, "O blessed compassion of His Mother!" Even if we are incapable of realizing all the glory of Mary, we can at least understand that this glory is proportionate to her sufferings.

2. It is the same law for us. An eternal weight of glory is to recompense us for our momentary

slight tribulation (2 Cor. iv. 17). Let us meditate on this truth, and we shall understand how the Saints on earth thirsted for suffering.

COLLOQUY.

Let us address ourselves to our suffering Mother at the foot of the Cross like affectionate children, confident in the love she bears us.

Stabat Mater.

THIRTIETH DAY: THE CONSENT OF MARY TO THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—To the suffering of Mary is joined one sublime action: Mary consents to the great sacrifice of Jesus. We shall consider three admirable effects of this consent: (1) It *sanctifies Mary*; (2) it *gives her to us as our Mother*; (3) it *makes of her the co-redemptress of the world*.

MEDITATION.

“*Sicut abundant passionnes Christi in nobis, ita et per Christum abundat consolatio nostra*”—As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ doth our comfort abound (2 Cor. i. 5).

First Prelude.—Let us recall the scene on Calvary with Mary at the foot of the Cross.

Second Prelude.—Let us pray most earnestly that we may understand both the dignity of Mary and her part in the economy of our salvation, so that we may admire her more, and show her more gratitude in the performance of all our duties towards her.

I. MARY IS SANCTIFIED BY GIVING HER CONSENT TO THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD.

1. The whole life of Our Lord was the execution of this sublime design—to prepare our sanctification by His teaching and example ; to redeem us and make us His brethren by His painful death upon the Cross. But long before the sacrifice was consummated on Calvary the offering had been inwardly made in the heart of the victim. St. Paul fixes the solemn moment of this offering at the very beginning of Our Lord's life. " Wherefore, when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not, but a body Thou hast fitted to me. . . . Then said I, Behold I come that I should do Thy will, O God " (Heb. x. 5-7). And we suppose that it was renewed in the symbolic ceremony of the presentation in the Temple. Now the Gospel informs us of the presence of Mary on both these occasions of inward offering, as it shows her to us at the hour of the completion of the sacrifice. She was not there merely as a witness, but by the consent she gave she took part in the offering and the consummation. God became man only when Mary had consented to become the Mother of God. She herself carried Jesus to the Temple, and who has ever doubted that this incomparable Mother stood by her Crucified Son, not only to die with Him, but also to ratify the sacrifice ?

What act could have a greater value in God's sight ? The more intimately Mary is associated with Jesus in the work of redemption of the human race, the more fully does she participate in the

merits of our Saviour and in the fruits of redemption.

2. Love and imitation may bring us near to Our Divine Lord. In the same measure as we unite ourselves to Him He will communicate to us the infinite treasures which He gained by His sufferings. What riches are more to be desired than these ?

II. MARY, BY THAT CONSENT, BECAME OUR MOTHER.

This consent does more than enrich Mary with immense merits : it gives her a share in the fruits of the offering, as well as in the offering itself. As Jesus brings us forth from His heart, opened by the lance, so (to use the words of Bossuet) does Mary bring us forth "from a heart torn by an infinite sorrow." She is the new Eve, the Mother of all living, for by her consent she helps to give birth to us all. Mary henceforth has a Son Who costs her nothing, and Who gives her everything ; and she has other children to whom she gives everything, and who have cost her this dear Son Himself. We all are those children.

She is our Mother. Let us try to realize what a loving Mother she is to us in her desolation, and how we are bound to her by the duty of holy and tender affection.

III. MARY, BY HER CONSENT, IS THE CO-REDEMPTRESS OF THE HUMAN RACE.

I. The Gospels do not give a complete biography of the Blessed Virgin. They were written not so

much to narrate the events of a life as to spread the Christian faith. It is, therefore, not undesignedly that they show us Mary beside Jesus at the moment when He offers Himself in sacrifice. She had her place assigned her there because she was destined to co-operate more than any other in the redemption of the human race. Mary saves us because, in consenting to the sacrifice of her Son, she gives to us Jesus Christ and His merits. She saves us a second time because, being full of graces herself, she intercedes in our favour, and obtains for us a participation in those merits. She saves us, again, because, when we see this gentle Queen standing between Jesus and ourselves, our hearts are filled with confidence, and are at the same time in a better disposition to receive the graces of our Saviour.

In this way the Divine plan of the redemption of the world receives through Mary an accidental perfection which helps to spread its marvellous results over all the world.

2. But this mission, as well as the spiritual maternity of Mary, explains the special devotion which we pay to the sorrows of Our Lady. To her sufferings, as to those of Jesus, we owe the homage of compassion, and the Church, by the institution of two feasts consecrated to the dolours of Our Lady, and by the *Stabat Mater*, formally invites us to pay that debt. In meditating on the lives of other Saints, we admire the laurels with which they are crowned, we rejoice at the eternal glory which their sufferings have gained for them ; but we do not linger over the details of those sufferings in order to excite emotion in ourselves.

That is because they have not the same purpose as the sufferings of Mary. Certainly the superabundant satisfactions of the Saints, poured into the treasury of the Church, united as they are to those of Jesus Christ, help to obtain mercy and pardon for us from God ; but they were directed more particularly towards the sanctification and the happiness of those who endured them. The sufferings of Mary are more closely united to the sufferings of Jesus Christ. No other Saint was ever called upon, as Mary was, to extend to the whole world the favour of an intercession which obtains for that world the application of the merits of Christ. The Saints may have suffered voluntarily for the benefit of certain souls whose necessities Divine Providence has revealed to them, but they cannot be said to have suffered for us ; while Mary has suffered truly for all of us, and for our sins, and therefore, as we compassionate Jesus as our Redeemer, we compassionate Mary as our co-redemptress whom we have afflicted, and who contributes by her sufferings to our salvation.

COLLOQUY.

In deepest reverence and love let us offer ourselves to Mary, that we may always remember her sufferings with filial gratitude, and ask her to show us the virtue of her intercession by obtaining for us truly compassionate hearts.

Stabat Mater.

SEVENTH SECTION

AFTER THE ASCENSION

THIRTY-FIRST DAY: MARY AND THE
CHURCH OF THE CENACLE.

PLAN OF THE MEDITATION.—St. Luke transports us from Calvary to the Cenacle, where the Apostles were persevering in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the holy women, and those whom the Evangelist calls the brethren of Jesus. This last meditation, then, will be devoted to the relations of Mary and the infant Church. We shall consider (1) the *office of Mary in the infant Church*; (2) the *prayer of Mary*; (3) the *expectation of the Holy Ghost*.

MEDITATION.

“*Erant perseverantes unanimiter in oratione cum mulieribus, et Maria Matre Jesu*”—All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus (Acts i. 14).

First Prelude.—Before His Ascension Our Lord directed His Apostles to return to Jerusalem, and there await the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Faithful to His command, when their good Master had finally disappeared from their sight, they withdrew to the Cenacle, the place hallowed by the institution of the Holy Eucharist, and there persevered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Second Prelude.—Let us picture to ourselves the upper room of the Cenacle, a modest sanctuary made sacred by many holy memories.

Third Prelude.—Let us earnestly ask for the grace to live like Mary in perfect detachment from the things of this world, in constant recollection, and in submission to the voice of the Holy Ghost.

I. MARY IN THE INFANT CHURCH.

I. 1. The short period of the hidden life of the Church is passed in the Cenacle. Mary is there, as she was at Bethlehem and Nazareth, filling the same office towards the Spouse of Christ that she had filled towards Christ Himself, watching it with the same loving care. She lives only for this. Her Son is in Heaven, and there is nothing to keep her on earth but her mission of edification and motherly love towards the assembly of the faithful. We see Mary as the perfect model of Christian life, and Mother of the mystical body of Christ, and we may be sure that she desired to be for the members of that mystical body all that she had been for its head.

2. In the assembly of the disciples Mary is the soul of that perfect unity which is made apparent in the Acts of the Apostles. They were persevering *unanimiter*—with one mind. Mary's wise counsel and guidance kept all in harmony and peace, and the assembled disciples had, as it were, a foretaste of Paradise.

3. The moment has now arrived for Mary to reveal that part of the life of our Saviour which she alone could fully know—the message of Gabriel, the Incarnation of the Word, the circumstances of the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, the flight into Egypt, the adoration of the Magi, the

astonishment of the Doctors in the Temple, the years of Nazareth—a story of surpassing interest, which warmed their hearts and illuminated their minds.

Thanks to Mary, the Apostles know more of Jesus than they knew before, but we all know Him better still. Mary is the authorized witness who dictated to St. Luke the Gospel of the infancy of Our Lord. Through Mary the public life is united to the hidden life. There is no contradiction between them, but each is the completion of the other, and the two together form a story of humility and greatness, of simplicity and magnificence, of ordinary events and miracles, such as we should expect to find in the life of Him Who desired to manifest Himself as true God and true man.

4. Add to all this the perpetual example of all the virtues, and you will understand how Mary continually keeps together the children of the Church, teaching them and edifying them without ever departing from that modest demeanour which is proper to her sex and condition.

II. We also, according to the circumstances of our own state of life, have the opportunity given to us of edifying others if our conversation tends to bring men nearer to one another, and if our actions testify our desire to serve God. The preaching of the actions of every day and every hour is much more effective than any oral eloquence, and the man who exerts this influence will remain unaware how great it has been until the day when, surprised like the merciful man in the Gospel, he shall hear the words of the Sovereign Judge: "Come, blessed of My Father; thou wast

one of the peacemakers who are called the children of God. I knocked at the door, and thou hast opened hearts and minds for Me. Come, possess the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world " (St. Matt. xxv. 34).

Let us pass through life in these dispositions, and we shall feel much nearer to our Father Who is in Heaven.

II. MARY PRAYING WITH THE CHURCH.

I. 1. During these ten days of prayer the intercession of Mary was the constant support of the prayer of the Apostles. With what power she implored the Holy Ghost to come down and transform the Apostles, as He had once come down to form the Sacred Humanity of the Word of God !

2. That is the image of what goes on continually. In Heaven Mary is always helping the Church and its children by her prayers. Let us be quite sure of that. Mary prays with us, and the more love and confidence we show her, the more earnestly we try to make our lives worthy of her, the more she will do to help us. That is, indeed, the Divine plan. God in His wisdom requires a good-will from all of us, and a proof of the sincerity of our devotion is necessary before Mary will give us her aid.

II. We can profit by the example of Mary in another way by interesting ourselves in the Church, and offering prayers and sacrifices for its needs. Every Christian should identify the cause of Christ and His family with his own. This is a truth useful for our own guidance, and to instil into the

most humble. Thus, the Christian ideal will quicken their fervour and piety, and the most obscure of Christ's flock, when he sees his influence for good extending, will be guarded against the seductions of evil by the pride that he feels in this work for Christ.

III. MARY IN HER EXPECTATION OF THE HOLY GHOST.

I. 1. Mary looks for the Holy Ghost for herself. She makes it her aim to increase every day the treasure of Divine graces that already abound in her. On the Day of Pentecost she will receive another outpouring. Whether to adorn her own soul or to use for the conversion of others, she will receive a larger share than any other of the gifts then dispensed to men.

The treasures of God are infinite. There is no spiritual obstacle so formidable that it cannot be surmounted. Mary gives us an example of the holy eagerness we ought to show to make continual progress towards God.

2. Mary looks for the Holy Ghost with the Church and for the Church. He is the promised Comforter. Jesus is no longer visible on earth. Between the sensible vision of a few years and the eternal vision which will be enjoyed by all the elect there is a period of faith, during which we must believe without seeing, but during which the light and the power of the Holy Ghost will illuminate our understanding and strengthen our will. The Spirit of God reigns in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful.

In this scene of pious recollection ends the Gospel history of the Blessed Virgin. She disappears from our sight as did her Divine Son ; she disappears as if absorbed in the Holy Ghost, Who sanctifies her before crowning her with glory.

II. In the various circumstances of our lives our conduct should always resemble that of Mary. We have to live recollected in thanksgiving and in the expectation of new favours. Our thanksgiving must ascend to the throne of God for favours received, that they may bring down each day Divine light and inspirations to sanctify us and enable us to do good to all around us.

COLLOQUY.

At the end of these meditations for the month of May we can learn no more useful lesson from all that Mary has taught us than devotion to the Holy Ghost. Let us beg through Mary a large share of His grace. Let us at the same time offer to Mary our prayers for the month of May, and ask her to lead us, so that we may devoutly begin the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of her Divine Son.

Pater, Ave, Te Deum.

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